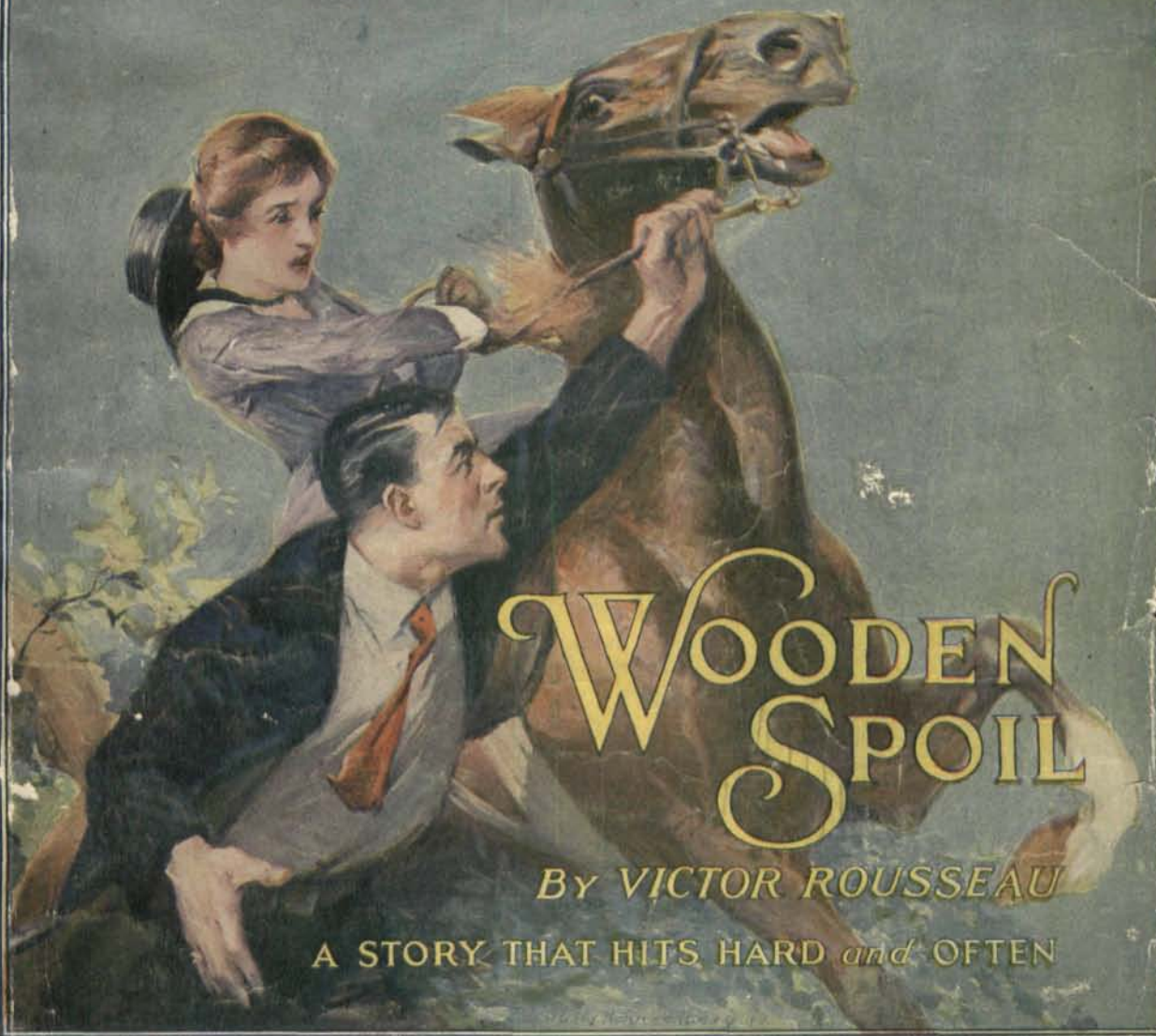
THE ARGOSY

Issued Weekly



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By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

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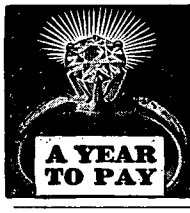

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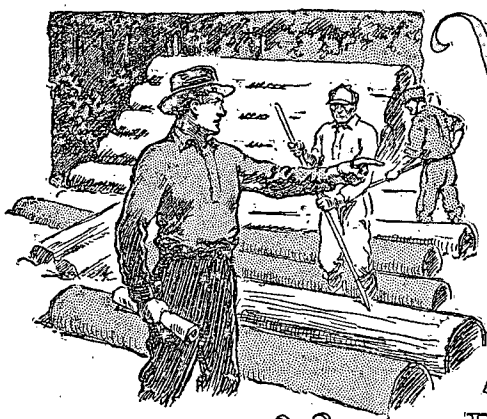

Wooden Spoil

by

Victor Rousseau

Author of "Midsummer Madness," "The Sea Demons," etc.

CHAPTER I.

STARTING SOMETHING.

LAMARTINE, of Quebec, was startled. The visit had followed the letter much too quickly to suit him.

"Tell M. Askew that I am busy with an important case," he said to the boy who had brought in the visitor's card. "Ask him to call to-morrow."

The boy came back.

"M. Askew says he's busy, too, and he'll wait," he said.

M. Lamartine frowned.

"Tell him that I have to leave immediately for the courts," he said. "And tell him I shall be here to-morrow at the same hour."

The boy came back again.

"He says he'll walk to the courts with you," he said.

The notary considered.

"Well, tell him I'll see him in a moment for a few minutes," he answered.

When the boy was gone he took down the telephone receiver and called up the Frontenac, asking for a certain room.

"Is that you, Brousseau?" he inquired. "M. Hilary Askew has turned up."

There was a sputtering at the other end of the line which caused the notary to smile.

"I can't say. I haven't seen him yet," he said in answer. "But if I can't send him home with a smile on his face and a check in his pocket, I shall try to keep him in Quebec until I've seen you. I'll call you as soon as he's gone. And you'd better try to get Morris by long-distance at once and prepare him. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver, rang for the boy again, and told him to admit Mr. Askew. He looked keenly at Hilary as he shook hands with him.

"Your visit has followed very close upon your letter, Mr. Askew," he said. "Perhaps you did not receive mine, advising you to wait before coming to Quebec?"

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"No," said Hilary, "but I should have come anyway. I want to get this matter settled."

"The American haste," said the notary. "But the law is not to be taken by storm, least of all in Quebec. There are all sorts of preliminaries and formalities, Mr. Askew. It is less than a month since your uncle died. Perhaps it will be months more before we can legally convey the property to you. I understand," he added, "that you were not in close touch with Mr. Jonas Askew during his latter years?"

"I hadn't seen him more than twice since I was a boy. That was what made the legacy a surprising one. He had not shown any interest in me. I had a hard fight to get through my forestry course at college. It is a very restricted profession. So when I heard that I had become the owner of a tract of a hundred square miles it seemed like an intervention of Providence. That is like a little kingdom, sir."

The notary smiled.

"I suppose it must seem a large territory to you," he said, "although the Rosny seigniory was one of the smallest of the old feudal grants. It is almost the last on the north shore of the St. Lawrence that remains in the hands of the original family."

"Remains?" asked Hilary.

The notary raised his eyebrows.

"You are aware, Mr. Askew, that you do not possess the freehold?" he asked.

"On the contrary. I thought— But please tell me what my rights are, then?"

"You own the timber rights over the seigniory," replied the other. "You own the trees; M. Edmond Rosny owns the land. Your uncle paid four hundred thousand dollars for the timber. The land on which it stands could find no bidders at one-twentieth of that sum; nor would M. Rosny sell it.

"Your uncle," continued the notary, "made this investment against the advice of a good many people. He was at the time interested in the Adamson Paper Company, of Cornwall, which supplied paper to a chain of newspapers in the smaller cities under a long-term contract which was beginning to prove hard, owing to the rising cost of pulpwood. The Adamson people were faced with a deficit that might end in bankruptcy before their contract expired.

"Your uncle thought that the acquisition of this tract would enable the firm to pull through with a substantial profit. Unfortunately, your uncle's judgment was as poor as his obstinacy was strong. The Rosny timber rights are practically valueless, because the wood is principally fir balsam instead of pine and spruce."

He was a little disconcerted because Hilary only watched him instead of answering, and he began to feel that he would not be disposed of as easily as he had anticipated.

"The property has never begun to pay its way," he went on. "The Adamson people were forced to carry out their contract at a ruinous loss, and the firm was subsequently forced into liquidation. Your uncle continued to pay out large sums to keep the mill in operation, disposing of his lumber at a loss, rather than confess to an error in judgment. And he only paid his territory two short visits in his life."

"But surely something could be done to produce a reasonable profit," urged Hilary.

"This is the situation," answered Lamartine. "The fir is too gummy to make any but the most inferior paper. Most of the other wood is second-growth birch, which has sprung up after fires, and is of use only for firewood. There is, of course, spruce and pine, but it is too small and scarce to make its cutting profitable.

"A company with a large capital might find it commercially profitable to develop your territory. That is to say that, with its own transportation, and by using the most improved methods, it could probably work the few districts that have any pulpwood worth the cutting, skim the cream for a few years, and then let the tract go. But no single individual could screw a penny out of it without an ample fortune and a thorough knowledge of lumbering conditions in this province.

"The company I have in mind would pay you forty-five thousand dollars cash," continued the notary. "That would enable you to realize your aspirations and would make you independent for life."

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"What I want," said Hilary bluntly, "is the St. Boniface tract."

"The offer is too small? Of course, I could take up that point with the company—"

"I will discuss that after I have seen the limits."

The notary sighed.

"Well, at least, think the matter over for a day or two," he said. "Mr. Morris, the manager, is away on business. He should be in Quebec the day after to-morrow, and he could take you up with him when he returns."

"I am thinking of going sooner than that," said Hilary. "In fact, by to-morrow's boat."

M. Lamartine flung up his hands.

"Mr. Askew, I assure you your uncle was just as hasty in making decisions as yourself," he said. "You had better wait for Mr. Morris. He is a man of expert judgment. You cannot have a better adviser, and he has absolutely no personal interest one way or another. Canadian timber cannot be judged by the standards of the United States. There are so many things to consider; and then—you don't speak French, do you?"

"A little."

"It would not help you, anyway. The dialect up at St. Boniface is seventeenth century, and corrupt at that. They are a wild lot up there, a very bad set of people indeed; smugglers and poachers, Mr. Askew."

Though slow to suspicion, Hilary, who had sensed Lamartine's objection to his going to St. Boniface unaccompanied, now began to feel sure that the notary had some personal purpose behind his rather incoherent objections. It hardened his resolution.

"I shall leave on the boat to-morrow morning," he said. "I shall reply to your offer as soon as I have made up my mind. Will you let me have the papers, M. Lamartine, including the last half-yearly statement, and the map of the limits?"

"My dear sir, it will be three months at least before we can put you in possession of your land," protested the notary. "You do not realize—"

"I shall take possession, M. Lamartine. At least, nobody has a better claim."

"But it would be entirely irregular, Mr. Askew."

Hilary smiled, and Lamartine read his defeat in that smile. And he had only the comfort that Hilary had, at least, verified his prediction made as soon as he set eyes on him.

"Let me have the papers, please," said Hilary. "And you need have no qualms as to your responsibility for my success. You have done your duty in advising me."

"Of course, if that is your decision, there is nothing more for me to say," answered the notary. "You will find the statement here," he continued, handing Hilary an envelope containing some papers. "Mr. Morris has the books and the map at St. Boniface. I wish you a pleasant journey, sir. I am to continue to represent you?"

"For the present, yes. Good day."

When Hilary was gone M. Lamartine sat back in his chair and drummed his fingers for nearly a minute. Then he called up his friend Brousseau again.

"He's just gone," he said. "And he starts for St. Boniface on to-morrow's boat, in spite of all my representations."

He smiled at the outburst that came back to him.

"You had better wait for Morris and go up with him on the next boat," he said. "Take my advice, and don't go up to-morrow. You'll only injure yourself by being precipitate. Get Morris here the minute he arrives, and we'll talk the situation over. M. Askew won't learn much if he does get to St. Boniface ahead of you, unless your man Connell talks, and I understand he is reliable. I suggest that you get Connell on the telephone to-day and advise him of the situation and give him his instructions."

CHAPTER II.

LOOKING THINGS OVER.

IT was late in the afternoon when Hilary reached St. Boniface on the little mail-boat. He looked about him with approval when he stood upon the porch of the tiny

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hotel at St. Boniface. He saw the gray waters of the St. Lawrence before him, the gulls dipping and soaring over them. The south shore was still invisible in the distance.

On either side extended the great hills, crested with evergreens, among which were the white trunks of the birches, whose leaves were already beginning to be touched with the red and gold of late August. The narrow beach, along which straggled raspberry briers, was coated with chips from the pulp-mill borne out to sea from the flume and carried back, to be strewn in successive layers by the incoming tides.

A mile or so to the west Hilary saw, in a curving bay, the end of the flume, an elevated structure supported on high wooden posts that ran into the water beside the wharf. Here lay a large schooner. In the middle of the gulf was a long, narrow island, densely wooded.

Nobody else had got off the boat at St. Boniface, and evidently the landlord expected nobody. After an ineffective attempt to enter into conversation with him, in which hardly a word was mutually intelligible, Hilary gave up the effort and started up the hill road which led, he surmised, toward the lumber mill.

He saw the mill from the top of the cliff. Behind was the church; in front, beyond a dip in the road, where a foaming torrent was spanned by a rattletrap bridge, was the long flume, with the store and mill offices beside it, and a cluster of workmen's cottages of unpainted boards and logs.

The entire settlement of the mill workers was gathered about the curving shores of a little bay. Beyond it were the mountains, on either side of the forest-clad slopes, broken by the deep cleft of a river, whose mouth, closed by a boom above the torrent, was a congestion of short logs.

Between the end of the wharf and the incurving shore was visible the funnel of a steam-tug, sunk in the water.

Hilary crossed the bridge and went toward the mill. Two or three men, lounging outside the store, looked at him without displaying any sign of interest. A mongrel dog, lying in the sun, raised its head, yelped once, and went to sleep again.

Everything was very peaceful; the only sounds were the subdued hum of the mill machinery, and a quick rattling, almost like Maxim fire, which Hilary adjudged correctly to be caused by the logs from the flume falling into the hold of the lumber-schooner at the wharf.

Between the dam and the store, upon a terrain heaped with tin cans and other débris, were piles of wood in four-foot lengths, each consisting of about two hundred cords.

Kneeling at the end of one of these was a little man, the whiteness of whose upper lip, in striking contrast with a sun-blackened face, indicated that a mustache had grown there until recently. He was scaling, or measuring, the pile, and muttering as he jotted down his figures. Hilary walked up and stood beside him watching interestedly.

"How many cords are there in one of these piles?" he asked.

The little man shook his head without looking up, and continued his figuring. Hilary waited till he had finished, but the little man showed no indications of answering him.

The lumber was mostly black spruce, with some white spruce and red pine. The mass in the river, if it was of the same quality, hardly substantiated Lamartine's statements.

"You seem to have some good wood on the seigniory," said Hilary.

The little man leaped to his feet, waving his arms excitedly.

"What you want here?" he demanded. "Strangers are not allowed on the property. You take the road!"

"That's an unusual order," said Hilary, looking at the other in amusement. "Why?"

"It's Mr. Morris's orders."

"I'm going to change that," said Hilary. "In future you'll let anybody come and see anything he wants to."

The little man opened his mouth in astonishment.

"Maybe you're the boss, eh?" he inquired with sarcasm.

"I am. I'm Mr. Askew," answered Hilary.

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The little man did not know what to make of this. He stared and gaped again.

"But Mr. Morris ain't here," he said at length, as if the solution of this problem was beyond him.

"Well, he ought to be here," said Hilary. "That's what I'm paying him for. What's your name?"

"Jean-Marie Baptiste. You ain't lying, are you?"

"No, I'm not lying. Perhaps you didn't expect me, M. Baptiste?"

"Holy Name, no! I heard you sold out to the company."

"What company?" demanded Hilary sharply.

"The Ste. Marie Company. The company of M. Brousseau."

Hilary took the little man by the arm.

"See here, Baptiste," he said, "let us begin by understanding each other. I know nothing about any company except myself. I own the cutting rights on this property, the mill, and the business. Have you got that?"

Baptiste gaped again, and disengaged himself diplomatically.

"I guess you want to see Mr. Connell, the foreman," he said. "It ain't my job. Mr. Morris hires me. If you pay me my wages maybe you can hire me, too. You'll find Mr. Connell in the office, or maybe in the store," he added.

"Bring him here," said Hilary. "Tell him I'm waiting for him. And, Baptiste—"

"*Monsieur?*"

"I don't like waiting. Hurry!" said Hilary.

The little man departed at a trot, quite evidently startled, casting back comical looks over his shoulder as he ran.

His remarks in the store must have created a good deal of a sensation, for presently two clerks, as well as the two loungers, who had sauntered inside during Hilary's conversation with Baptiste, came to the door and stared. Disengaging himself from among these came the foreman, a tall, lanky, lean New Englander, whose typical bearing and deliberate slouch warmed Hilary's heart instantly.

"I'm Lafe Connell, at your service, Mr. Askew," said the foreman, coming up respectfully.

"I suppose I should have let you people know that I was coming," said Hilary.

He wondered why Lafe Connell whistled; he knew nothing, of course, of Brousseau's telephonic message.

"I guess you'll find things upset a little," said Connell. "Mr. Morris has been away for a couple of weeks. But I guess you can go into the office and make yourself at home there, Mr. Askew," he continued, a flash of humor irradiating his face as he jerked his thumb toward the tin-roofed shanty. "It's about knocking-off time, though," he added, pulling out a large silver watch and looking at it.

Hilary noted his embarrassment.

"To-morrow will be soon enough for me to start in," he said. "I'm pleased to have met you, Mr. Connell."

"Wait a minute," said the foreman. "If you don't mind having me, I'll get my coat and go up to the hotel with you. I'm bunking there for a few days till my landlady gets her house fixed up." He looked toward the shanties and smiled at his words. "She had a fire. And maybe there'll be a few things that you'll want to ask me."

"All right," said Hilary.

Lafe Connell hurried back to the store. The storekeeper, his clerk, and the two loungers broke into excited chattering. Lafe, who did not speak a word of French, in spite of his position, but controlled the men through the medium of Baptiste, left the little man to answer the questions that were addressed to him, put on his coat, and went out. Jean Baptiste accompanied him a short distance from the door.

"I guess you find out why he come here, like M. Brousseau telephone you," he volunteered.

"Oh, shucks! What's the use?" responded Lafe wearily. "Either he's come to sell, in which case there ain't nothing to find out, or else he's come to stay, and he finds how we've been running things and fires the whole outfit. I tell you, Baptiste, it's times like this that makes me wish I was back in Shoeburyport."

"Oh, it ain't so bad, Lafe," answered the little Frenchman optimistically.

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He left him, and Lafe Connell joined Hilary. They went together in silence across the shaking bridge and ascended the hill, each quietly taking stock of the other. At the summit, where a branch road ran off at right angles to that which crested the cliff, a figure on horseback appeared in the distance. The two men stopped to take breath for a few moments and to give the rider freeway.

It was a girl, riding side-saddle. As the horse drew near she pulled in to take the turn slowly without scattering dust, passing within a few feet of Hilary.

He saw that she was about twenty years of age, or a little more, slight, very straight upon the saddle, with gray-blue eyes and brown hair blown by the wind about her flushed cheeks.

Her profile as she turned was charming; but the whole picture of the girl upon the horse was charming, even more than beautiful. There was a combination of dignity and simplicity about her, both in her demeanor and in the way she rode, and in her acknowledgment of Connell's greeting.

Hilary watched her canter up the road until she had disappeared among the trees. Then he realized that he had not taken his eyes off her since he had seen her first.

"That," said Lafe, "is Mlle. Hermine Rosny. Her father's what they call the seigneur."

"The owner of the seigniory?" asked Hilary, although he knew this perfectly.

"Yes, Mr. Askew. I guess she wouldn't have smiled so pleasant if she had known who you was."

"Why, Mr. Connell?"

Lafe jerked his thumb vaguely about the horizon.

"Proud old boy," he explained. "Family's be'n here nigh on a thousand years, I guess—leastways, since them Frenchmen first come to this continent. Hated like thunder to let your uncle have the timber rights. But he'd had trouble with Brousseau, and he wouldn't sell to him, and Mlle. Hermine must have cost a mint of money finishing up in the convent at Paris, France. I guess he's land poor, like the rest of the big folks round here. But the old man, he don't care, and Mlle. Hermine's thinking of other things than living here all her days, I guess."

Hilary was wondering what Rosny had done with his uncle's four hundred thousand. He could hardly have spent a tithe of that upon his daughter's education, even in Paris.

In the hotel the landlord's wife was already preparing supper. They ate an omelet, washed down with strong tea and followed by raspberries and cream. Then they went out on the porch and lit their pipes.

"You are the foreman, I understand?" asked Hilary.

"Yes, Mr. Askew. I took the job soon after your uncle bought the timber rights. I'd be'n up here for a Boston newspaper which was looking round for a pulp supply. Mr. Morris offered me the job, although I didn't speak the language, because I've be'n in the business all my life. So I took it. And I've be'n sorry ever since."

"Why?"

"It's a hell of a country," answered Lafe. "I never guessed such folks existed in a civilized land before."

"What's the trouble?" asked Hilary, perceiving that Connell was laboring under some repressed excitement.

"They paint their houses yellow and green," said Lafe, "when they paint 'em at all. Not yellow or green, but yellow and green, and maybe blue, and a splash of red for variety. I never saw a green house with a yellow porch in my life before I came up here."

"Just a difference of taste, Mr. Connell."

"Maybe," said Lafe sourly. "Maybe it's all right not to have sense enough to plaster their houses, so as to freeze to death in winter time. Maybe it's all right to run to Father Lucy when there's a forest fire, instead of getting busy and putting it out. Maybe he can pray it out for 'em faster.

"Maybe it's all right for them schooners to have the front mast higher than the back, and for it to rain six weeks without stopping, when it starts to rain, because it's got set, like these folks, and hasn't sense to stop. I got nothing else against the place, except that my wife Clarice and

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the kids are in Shoeburyport, and I'd rather rot here alone than bring 'em up. But what's the use? I'm here, and I've got to stay here," he ended, shrugging his shoulders. "That is, of course, unless you discharge me."

"You're under contract?"

"By the year. I told Mr. Morris I'd get out on the first of the year, but I said that last year, and the year before, and I guess he don't take much stock of that now. I'm here for another year, unless I'm put out, till I get my home in Shoeburyport paid for."

"Well, Mr. Connell, I mean to take hold, and I mean to make the business pay," said Hilary. "It hasn't paid very well, I understand?"

Lafe floundered.

"Of course, I don't know nothing about the financial end," he said. "I've heard it don't pay as well as it ought."

"Too much fir?" suggested Hilary.

"Why, there is some fir," conceded Lafe. "But there's some good spruce along Rocky River," he added, with innate truthfulness and pride.

"I saw a good pile in the river."

"Why, that ain't our cutting," answered Lafe. "Most of that comes from the Ste. Marie limits. They got some mighty good wood there, Mr. Askew."

"Where and what is Ste. Marie?"

"Ste. Marie's two miles along the shore, beyond St. Boniface," said Lafe. "Most of the hands come from there. There's quite a town, of a sort, sprung up since the company started. It's a tough place, Mr. Askew. I seen some tough towns in the West, but this has got 'em all beat, with the smuggling and drinking, and fights every Saturday night—there was a man knifed there last week; and not a policeman within a hundred miles, and nobody except Father Lucy, and he can't hold 'em."

"What I want to know," said Hilary, "is, what this company is that you speak about, and how they came to use Rocky River for their logs."

Lafe hesitated, but only for a moment. Then he mentally cast Brousseau to the winds as an intolerable burden.

"It's this way, Mr. Askew," he answered. "Mr. Brousseau and Mr. Morris have a company of their own. Their limits touch ours on the west, and run alongside of ours ten miles or so back into the woods. They got the right to float their logs down the river."

"Where is their mill?"

"They lease ours by the year."

Hilary was staggered. Morris, as his uncle's manager, leasing the mill to himself, as a partner in Brousseau's company, seemed a queer rôle. But Lafe could not see his face in the darkness, and, puffing at his pipe, he fell into a ruminative silence covering who knows what dreams of Shoeburyport?

"Who is this Mr. Brousseau?" asked Hilary presently.

"The boss," answered Lafe. "At least, the nearest thing to a boss that they got up here, and I guess he ain't far short of one. He tells the folks how to vote, and gets 'em out of trouble, and they send his friends into Parliament at Quebec. He's got a fine house over on the hill, between St. Boniface and Ste. Marie. That was his father, old Jacques, the trapper, at the bridge as we passed."

"I didn't notice him."

"Old Jacques was Mr. Rosny's father's slave, or whatever they used to be in those days. Mr. Brousseau was brought up as a boy on the seigniory. Mr. Rosny got interested in him and educated him, and I guess he's sorry now. Mr. Brousseau's done well for himself, and he's going to do better."

Lafe tapped the ashes out of his pipe and put it in his pocket.

"He's got old Rosny like that," he said, lifting the pocket-flap. "He's got him bound and mortgaged after leading him to throw your uncle's money away in crazy investments. When Brousseau was a kid, growing up among the house servants at the *château,* he wanted to be a big man, for which I don't blame him.

"He got what he wanted, but that wasn't enough. He wanted the seigniory and the seigneur's place, because he found that the folks up here thought more of old Mr. Rosny, with his broken-down property

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and his debts, than they did of him with all his money. So he set to work and got Mr. Rosny in his power.

"The old man hates and despises him, and he's been fighting against it for a long time, but he knows what's coming, and I guess he's made up his mind he'll have to stomach it.

"Brousseau's playing old Mr. Rosny's family pride against his love, and he knows which is stronger. So he's won Ma'm'selle Hermine as the price of leaving Rosny the property. That's what they're saying, anyhow."

He rose.

"That 'll be all for to-night, Mr. Askew?" he asked.

Hilary got up too.

"Thanks, yes, Connell," he said. "In the morning I shall ask you to show me around."

He did not follow Lafe inside the hotel, but sat upon the porch, musing and listening to the crescendo of the breakers as the tide swept up along the river.

Lafe did not go to bed immediately. Incapable of speaking any French, he had the gift of many unlettered men of entering into communication with one entirely ignorant of his own language. He sat in the kitchen, chatting with M. Tremblay, the landlord, and the two men understood each other very well.

"Yep, he's the owner of the St. Boniface timber rights," he said. "The boss, you know, Tremblay. Comprenny? Mr. Askew—boss—come up to run the show. And he says he's going to stay. I guess he'll change his tune when he's seen some of these pink and green verandas round here like yours. It beats me what in the world got into your head to make you put a pink veranda on a yellow house, Tremblay.

"If I thought he'd make good on what he said I'd loosen up a bit. That fellow Brousseau gets on my nerves and leaves 'em raw, Tremblay. Raw—you understand me. And he had the nerve to tell me to do a dirty job for him—him that never hired me, nor couldn't, if he was to go down on his knees and beg me. Knees—these things, Tremblay. But what's the use? Mr. Askew 'll be hiking back to the States to-morrow week, and then I'd be up against it."

CHAPTER III.

HILARY TAKES ADVICE.

AFTER breakfast the next morning Lafe and Hilary set off in the landlord's buggy, with the intention of covering a part of the limits and seeing the nature of the timber.

Though it was not yet September, the jobbers were already in the woods with nucleus gangs, staking out their tracts for the ensuing year, dating from the first of October, and superintending the removal of old camps or the construction of new ones.

The swampers were cutting new paths and repairing the log bridges across the rivulets and marshy stretches. Here and there Hilary perceived these signs of activity as the carriage passed on its way beneath the overhanging branches of tall conifers, while Rocky River roared through the gorge beneath them.

Lafe indicated a tall old man, with a face the color of tanned leather, who sat in the doorway of a solitary cabin, mending a pair of moccasins.

"That's Jacques Brousseau," he said. "He's getting ready for winter now. He sits there and dreams all summer, till trapping is at hand, and then he makes for the woods."

At increasing intervals along the roadside were cabins, with little patches of cultivated ground about them. Hill after hill was surmounted, and others always appeared beyond.

"This road runs along the boundary?" asked Hilary.

"Yep, Mr. Askew. The Ste. Marie territory is on the right. The two runs neck and neck back into them mountains."

"There's plenty of good spruce here," said Hilary.

But he spoke mainly to himself, and Lafe did not answer. A dip in the road carried them across a little bridge spanning a creek that united here with Rocky River.

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They were now traveling inside the limits of the seigniory, with the creek on their right hand and Rocky River beyond it. Hilary noted the first growth spruce along the banks.

"Why don't we cut here, if the rest is mainly fir?" he asked, looking keenly at Lafe. "There's enough lumber here to fill our dam, instead of the Ste. Marie Company's logs."

Lafe answered volubly, but did not meet Hilary's eyes.

"You see, Mr. Askew, it's this way," he began to explain. "There's a good deal of fir on our property, and what pine and spruce there is is smallish. There was a big fire over this district fifteen years or so ago. Now, Mr. Morris calculates that if we go slow for a while and give the trees a chance to grow, they'll be worth twice as much in a few years. We're developing the property slowly, Mr. Askew—"

Hilary's hand fell on Lafe's shoulder.

"Connell," said Hilary, "I brought you up here with me to learn the truth from you. You're going to sign on again, and you're going to sign with me, not with Mr. Morris. And now I want to know the truth about all this."

Lafe stammered and hung his head like a schoolboy caught in wrong-doing. But Hilary's hand was gripping his shoulder, and at last Lafe raised his head.

"If I thought you'd stick here," he said, "I guess I'd back you to the limit. But you'll never stand for St. Boniface, Mr. Askew. There's a pink house with a blue veranda just beyond the mill—"

"That won't trouble me, Connell."

"Maybe not," admitted Lafe. "But it's the—the everything together, sir. And they're crooked. You'd never stand for the lumber business up here, because you're straight—I saw that the minute I set eyes on you. And a man's got to pull with the crowd if he wants to succeed.

"I thought, when I heard you was coming, you'd either be like Mr. Morris or else you'd swallow anything that was told you. But I was wrong. You ain't a fool, and you ain't crooked. Here business is crooked all through. You'll be selling out to Brousseau in a month's time, and that 'll be my finish, and my house in Shoeburyport ain't paid for yet."

"You're dead wrong, Connell," answered Hilary. "I like the looks of this country, and I'm here to stay. And the more trouble I find, the more fun I'm going to have. Now, Connell, suppose you forget about Mr. Brousseau for a while and consider yourself to be what you are, my paid employee. And you can count on me."

He held his hand out. For a moment Connell's keen, gray eyes met his in searching inquiry; then he stopped the horse deliberately, took Hilary's hand, and wrung it hard.

"I believe you mean what you say, Mr. Askew," he answered. "And you can count on me to the limit."

"I suppose that tale about the seigniory being overgrown with fir is a lie, Connell?" asked Hilary.

"Mostly," said Lafe. "There is plenty of fir, but there's as much spruce and pine as anywhere. Look at that!" he added, indicating a magnificent growth of red pine beside the road.

"So Morris has been playing double?"

Lafe nodded.

"You see, Mr. Askew, it's this way," he said. "When Morris came up here I believe he meant to run straight. He'd been a lumber man in a small way up in Ontario, and he wasn't wise to the game as it's played here. Here it's graft, and it's never been nothing else.

"I ain't saying that there ain't honest lumber companies. I know there are. But it's the biggest money-maker of the day, and there's a whole lot of sharks in it. So when Morris realized that your uncle didn't know nothing about the business, and didn't mind paying out what he was asked year after year, and left everything to him, he naturally fell for Brousseau's game.

"Brousseau had had his eye on the Rosny seigniory for a long time, but Rosny was sore and closed the deal with your uncle instead. Your uncle got the timber rights, but Brousseau already had the mortgage on the land, which ain't worth a damn, except that it puts Mr. Rosny in his power.

"Five years ago the Rosny seigniory was the only piece of freehold up this way. All

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round it was government land. Brosseau grabbed it by bringing in settlers and getting their titles of fifty cents an acre as soon as they'd registered. Then he started in to squeeze your uncle out. And Morris went with him.

"He played double, as you were saying, Mr. Askew. He went into partnership with Brousseau in the Ste. Marie Company, and they arranged to let our territory go to the devil, and gave out that story about the fir. There's a crooked lawyer down in Quebec who's in with them—I don't know his name—but the object of Brousseau's game was to freeze your uncle out and get the seigniory timber rights for his company for a song. The two companies together will make one of the finest properties in this country."

"I see," said Hilary thoughtfully.

"It's a big game, and there's money enough in it for all. And I guess Morris and Brousseau have been clearing up the St. Boniface territory and putting down the wood to the credit of the Ste. Marie, and swindling your uncle out of a good many dollars. They made me bookkeeper once. I got wise to the game and went back to my foreman's job. I guess Morris is a little afraid of me, and that's why he wants to keep me here—and here I am, Mr. Askew."

The rig turned off through the forest along a new road, through splendid timber. In the distance the ringing of axes began to be audible.

"This is Leblanc's new territory," Lafe explained.

"Who's he?" asked Hilary.

"Your chief jobber. He's logging this part on contract."

They reached a clearing, in which three log buildings were under construction. Superintending the work was a tall, rather fair man of about forty years, with a cast in one eye; and with him a short, thickset man of great muscular strength.

The two looked up furtively as the rig approached, and the short man, seeing Lafe, scowled. He had a heavy thatch of black hair, which hung over his forehead and gave him a gipsy aspect.

"Hello, Leblanc!" called Lafe. "I want you to know Mr. Askew, the new owner."

Leblanc nodded indifferently.

"Mr. Leblanc is clearing a camp for the next year's lease," continued Lafe.

"Is the lease signed?" asked Hilary.

"I have arranged with Mr. Morris," answered Leblanc shortly.

"You'll make your arrangements with me in future," said Hilary.

Leblanc stared insolently with one eye, the other fixing a tree trunk in the distance.

"I work for Mr. Morris. I make arrange with him," he answered.

"See here, Leblanc, you didn't catch who this gentleman is," said Lafe. "This is Mr. Askew, the nephew of the late Mr. Askew. He's boss now. You get me, Leblanc, don't you?"

Leblanc shrugged his shoulders and, turning, walked back without a word toward the lumbermen at work upon the camp buildings, accompanied by the short man.

Hilary flushed and was about to get out of the buggy, but Lafe's fingers closed about his wrist like a vise.

"Steady, Mr. Askew," he said. "Don't let those fellows get the best of you."

"Yes, you're right, Connell," said Hilary, sitting back, and Lafe turned the horse.

"Those fellows don't know no better," he said, as they drove back. "I guess they've run Brousseau's and Morris's game for them so long that they've lost their heads. They think they can do just what they want to. It ain't no use to get mad until you're fighting mad."

"But Brousseau has nothing to do with the St. Boniface property," exclaimed Hilary in exasperation.

Lafe shrugged his shoulders, and presently Hilary cooled down again.

"Who was the little man?" he asked.

"Black Pierre. He's Brousseau's principal crook. He's a troublesome man, Mr. Askew. It don't do to get into a fight with him till you're ready for the knockout, because his word goes in Ste. Marie and St. Boniface too largely."

"We'll fire him first thing," said Hilary.

"Why, he don't work for us," answered Lafe.

"Then, what in thunder is he doing on my concession, helping my chief jobber?"

"Well, there ain't no law against it if

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a man wants to give his help free," said Lafe. "I guess them two thieves are pretty thick together.

"You see, Mr. Askew, it's this way," he went on, seeing that Hilary was growing incensed again. "If you're going to clear up this mess, and I'm to help you—and remember, I'm staking my house in Shoeburyport that ain't paid for yet—you've got to lie low until you've got a grasp on the situation. And it ain't a bit of good going for the little fellows. They're the tail that Brousseau wags. You've got to go for him, Mr. Askew, and it's going to be the toughest fight you ever had, and I guess we're up against it hard.

"It ain't his crookedness that makes me sore on Brousseau. It's the means he uses to hold the people down. Now that fellow Pierre—he runs cargoes of liquor ashore from the south coast, and sells to the saloons in Ste. Marie. But that ain't the worst thing about him.

"There's a dozen homes along the gulf where his life wouldn't be worth a minute's purchase if he showed his face there. Brousseau's used Pierre to make Ste. Marie what it is, with its drinking-dens and saloons, and them other hell-dives. And that's what I've got most against Brousseau.

"He knows conditions there, and he uses them to keep the whip-hand over the place and send his man to Parliament, and get the contracts and the pickings. Say, I'll take you through Ste. Marie on the way back to the mill!"

They had reached the main road again; went on a little farther and then turned westward over a rough track through a burned-over district, densely covered with fireweed and white, starved asters. Soon another rig appeared approaching them, topping the hill. Lafe pulled in as it approached.

"*Bonjour,* Father Lucy!" he called to the elderly priest, attired in closely-fitting *soutane,* who sat inside. "Been over to Ste. Marie?"

"Good morning, Mr. Lafe," responded the other, reining in also. "Yes, Mr. Lafe."

"Father Lucy, this gentleman is Mr. Askew, the new owner of the Rosny rights. He's old Mr. Askew's nephew."

The curé looked Hilary over; then he leaned forward and extended his hand, which Hilary grasped.

"I am please to meet you, Mr. Askew," he said. "I 'ope we shall become frien's, like Mr. Lafe, here, an' not quarrel so much."

"Ah, Father Lucy, you're all right, but you make me tired sometimes," said Lafe. "Why didn't you get busy and pray out this fire here, instead of letting it blaze?"

"Mr. Lafe, there is many things you do not yet understand," said the curé, patting the Yankee on the back benevolently. "Mr. Lafe is fine fellow," he added to Hilary, "but he want to go too quick all the time."

"Well, say! I wouldn't have to go at more than a crawl to leave St. Boniface behind," answered Lafe. "The trouble with you folks is, you're too slow and set."

It was evident to Hilary that the two men were firm friends. Father Lucien raised his hat, clucked to his pony, and resumed his journey.

"Father Lucy's a good sort," admitted Lafe, "but he makes me tired a good deal. You can't move him, Mr. Askew. Slow as the devil. He knows what Ste. Marie is, and I've seen them saloon-keepers jeering at him in the streets and defying him, and that's a sight you couldn't see anywhere else in this province. And he goes there just the same. Say, it makes my blood boil! I told him I'd do anything to help him clean up the place, but I guess he ain't equal to the job, Mr. Askew.

"And yet, now I think of it, Father Lucy does get results in his own ways," he acknowledged a little later.

Another hour's drive brought them within sight of the village, a long street of frame houses, flanked by a swelling hill, beyond which the gulf was visible again.

Ste. Marie was much like St. Boniface on a larger scale, with the same shacks clustered about the offices of the company; but many of the houses were closed, and the tattered, lace-edged shades drawn, and fewer children played with the big mongrel sleigh-dogs that lay in the dust and blinked up at the sun.

They followed the road along the shore.

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A little distance from the village was Brousseau's new house, painted flamboyantly in white and green, with ornamental pillars and a criss-cross porch railing. Then as St. Boniface came into sight Hilary said:

"I think I'll go into the office."

"I guess you'll have to break it open, then," said Lafe. "Mr. Morris took the keys with him."

"When's he coming back?"

Lafe looked at him thoughtfully.

"Does he know you're here?" he inquired. "Well, if he does, I guess he'll be back to-morrow."

"I'll wait till to-morrow, then," said Hilary, after a moment of consideration. "Your advice was good, Connell—the advice you gave me in the woods."

Hilary left Lafe at the mill and drove slowly across the bridge, thinking hard.

As the rig topped the hill beyond the bridge, he became aware of Hermine Rosny upon her horse, at the end of the branch road, waiting for him to pass.

He felt awkward and uncertain, and wondered whether he should raise his hat to her. A glance at her face showed him that she knew who he was. It displayed a firm chin, a mouth resolutely set, two angry blue eyes, and flushed cheeks, whose color did not come from hard riding.

He was about to bow when the girl, averting her face, rode past him at the edge of the road and disappeared from sight beneath the crest.

Hilary jerked the reins angrily, and the horse set off at a gallop toward its stable. Before he had reached the hotel, however, Hilary was laughing. The girl's hostility seemed to add a zest to the game.

"I don't know that I'll be so very diplomatic with Brousseau after all," said Hilary, as he drew rein at the stable entrance.

CHAPTER IV.

FIRING AND HIRING.

NEXT morning Lafe telephoned Hilary at the hotel.

"Say, Mr. Askew," he said, "I'm phoning you from my old boarding-place. Brousseau and Morris got in early this morning by carriage from St. Joseph. They've been cross-questioning me and Baptiste all the morning. Brousseau's just left, and Morris has ordered the storekeeper's rig to drive over to the hotel in an hour's time."

"Thanks, Connell," said Hilary. "I'm much obliged. I'm coming right over."

He reached the office just in time to see Morris come out and make his way toward a rig at the door. Morris looked plainly disconcerted; it was evident that he knew who Hilary was at once.

He was an older man than Hilary had expected to meet; seemed well on the shady side of fifty. He was well-dressed, with an expansive collar and plenty of glazed cuff, and a white waistcoat that covered a pronounced obesity. He had elusive gray eyes, a prominent, but ill-defined nose, and a heavy, thready mustache. It was a type Hilary knew intimately, which hardly varies; the crooked business go-between.

Hilary got out and fastened the horse to the hitching-post in front of the office before addressing the other. He knew the psychological advantage of deliberation; read the success of his act in Morris's rather disturbed appearance.

"Mr. Askew, I am sure," said the manager, with affected joviality, holding out his hand, which Hilary took with no great relish. "I heard you were here, and I was just coming over to see you," he continued. "Somebody must have told you I had arrived?"

"I shall be glad to talk things over," answered Hilary, ignoring Morris's question.

Morris, recognizing the situation, accepted it, and, turning back, pulled a key out of his pocket and opened the office door. It was a well-furnished little room, with two desks and a revolving-chair, a set of drawers, and a small leather sofa.

Hilary sat down at the desk nearer the window, from which he could see the endless line of logs ascending the cogged chain that drew them into the mill flume.

Morris took a box of cigars from a drawer of his desk and offered it to Hilary, who declined. Morris selected one, bit off the end, and lit it. Hilary could see that his hand was shaking. Morris was breathing rather noisily.

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"Well, sir," he said, seating himself, "it was a great surprise to me to learn that you had arrived in St. Boniface. Mr. Lamartine told me you had been to Quebec and were thinking of coming on here, but I didn't expect you to come so soon."

"Mr. Lamartine tried to dissuade me," answered Hilary, "but I wanted to see the property."

"If you had let me know," said Morris, "I could have made arrangements. You have come in the slackest month of the year. There is very little to show you just now. But I shall arrange for you to enjoy your little visit. I suppose you will be staying long enough to do some fishing, Mr. Askew? There are some fine trout lakes in the neighborhood. We might make a day's trip of it."

"I have come here to assume charge, Mr. Morris," said Hilary curtly. "Please let me have the books and the map."

Morris plunged his hand into a drawer and took out a handkerchief, with which he wiped his forehead.

"That's—that's a sudden determination, Mr. Askew," he said, trying to smile.

"My decisions are usually sudden," said Hilary quietly. "I think over them first."

Morris laid one finger upon the edge of the desk.

"Of course, I know nothing of the reasons for this decision of yours, Mr. Askew," he said, in an aggrieved tone, "but if you intend to take charge immediately, in this impulsive way, it means that I must step out.

"The concession is not a paying proposition, as you are no doubt aware, but your uncle was satisfied with my management. I advised him to sell, although this meant the termination of my contract, but he declined to do so. I have kept expenses down to the lowest level."

"I have expressed no dissatisfaction with your management yet," answered Hilary. "Please let me see—"

"My suggestion," interposed the manager, "is merely that you withhold your decision until we can go over the books together. Frankly, if I were you, I should try to sell. There must be purchasers somewhere, and we could get a reasonable price if we worked the best tracts this winter and made a showing on the books. We might even show a small profit, and this was my advice to your uncle, but he was a little obstinate about confessing to an error in judgment."

"Before I see the books," said Hilary, as if the argument had made no impression on him, "I have a question to ask you. Are you not associated with the Ste. Marie Company?"

Morris wiped his forehead again.

"I—I certainly am," he answered, "but—"

"Another question. How do you reconcile that with your duties as manager here?"

"Now, my dear sir," protested Morris, "if that is your grievance I am glad to know it, and I assure you it is an unjustifiable one. There is nothing in my duties here that is incompatible with my having other interests. I am not a desk man, Mr. Askew, and I have never claimed to devote all my time to a single concern.

"I think you will find that I have not neglected my obligations toward your late uncle. As for the Ste. Marie Company, the fact that it is adjacent makes it easy for me to devote a little time to it, so far as I can spare it from my duties here. The two concerns are not in conflict, Mr. Askew. Quite the contrary.

"It is politic and necessary that we should pull together, especially in view of the race feeling which would otherwise be prejudicial to an American-owned concern. And it's good business, too. What helps one, helps the other."

"Quite so. I don't dispute your right to have other interests until I have seen your contract. But how about their use of our mill?"

"At a sum, Mr. Askew, which makes quite a little showing on the credit side of our ledgers. We can't afford to throw money away, and our cuttings are not large enough to monopolize the mill—not by any means."

"You mean the timber is poor?"

"Damn poor. Gummy fir, Mr. Askew. What we call north coast fir—all gum and pith. What little spruce there is I've been

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holding to make a show in case we decide to sell."

"That sounds plausible," said Hilary. "Why does the Ste. Marie Company wish to purchase this gummy fir of ours?"

Morris rose up, trembling with anger. He had not suspected that Hilary was in possession of this piece of knowledge.

"I see you have suspicions of my good faith, Mr. Askew," he said indignantly. "That is the only possible interpretation that I can put upon your question."

"If you will answer it, we can interpret it together afterward."

"I am not prepared to answer it offhand. Many companies might consider purchasing our property at a low rate. The Ste. Marie Company may or may not have that intention. I should no more think of disclosing the Ste. Marie's plans to you than I should think of disclosing your plans to the Ste. Marie. I keep my interests distinct and confidential, Mr. Askew."

"May I have the books and the map of the seigniory limits, showing the jobbers' districts, Mr. Morris?" asked Hilary patiently.

Morris found a key in his waistcoat pocket, inserted it after two failures, and threw up the top, revealing the books heaped together, as if they had just been under examination.

"Go through them by all means, if you think you've been swindled!" he cried, and flung a larger key upon the desk. "This is the office key," he continued. "The other desk contains my private papers."

"The map, Mr. Morris?"

"The seignority is bounded on the west by the Rocky River. It is a straight concession of seventy-five thousand, five hundred *arpents,* or thereabouts, with the opposite sides equal. If you want a map you'll have to go to the government."

"There must be a map," persisted Hilary.

"It isn't drawn to scale. I'm not going to give you an unscaled map when you're so mighty particular that you'll be likely to jump on me for errors. You'll find a rough plan of the leases among those papers. If a jobber wants to cut outside his lease, we let him. What's the harm? We don't go round with a twelve-inch ruler. That's all I have to say."

He moved toward the door, laid his hand on it, cleared his throat, and stopped.

"I have only to add that my annual contract expires on October first," he said with dignity. "If you wish to renew it or to terminate it, I require a month's notice."

Hilary looked up from the books, on which he was already engaged.

"You may regard it as terminating on October the first," he answered. "If I wish to make you a further proposition I shall do so after I have examined the financial record."

This time Morris's anger was quite unfeigned.

"You can accept my resignation now!" he shouted. "Do you think I am the sort of man to accept dismissal at the hands of a young American greenhorn like you? Why, I've thrown away thousands of my own money in the time I've spent trying to develop this rotten proposition of your uncle's, out of friendship for him.

"And what do you think you're going to make out of it? You'll be selling out for a song by spring, if you can find anybody to take the tract off your hands. That's all I have to say except that I'm resigning and not discharged; and if you say I'm discharged I'll sue you for libel in the Quebec courts."

Hilary looked up as he ended his diatribe and stood in the doorway.

"One moment, Mr. Morris," he said.

Morris looked at him uncertainly. He thought Hilary wanted to extend the olive branch.

"Of course, I didn't exactly mean—" he began.

"Take your cigars," said Hilary.

Mr. Morris turned purple, snorted, then snatched up the box and made his exit.

Hilary turned his attention to the books. Outside he heard the sound of many voices, but these died away presently, and he was soon absorbed in scrutinizing the statements and records before him.

He realized that a prolonged examination would be necessary before he could arrive at any reasonably exact estimate of the affairs of the concern. As for Morris,

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he was confident that the manager had been swindling him, both from Lafe's statements and from his own estimate of the man. There was a half-yearly deficit of several thousand dollars, and the dam should have been full of the St. Boniface lumber.

He closed the desk after a while and looked about the office. A door led into an extension of the two-story building, consisting of a comfortable little living-room with a huge stove, and a little kitchen at the back. A stairway evidently led up to the bedrooms. Hilary decided to make his headquarters there.

Morris was not greatly disturbed about the loss of his position; rather, he had been prepared for the worst since his interview with Lamartine. Brousseau, who had advised moderation and diplomacy, was waiting for him in his house at Ste. Marie, and Morris departed thither in the store rig.

Hilary had just returned into the office when there came a tap at the door. The anxious face of Jean Baptiste looked in.

"Monsieur Morris has gone away," he announced.

"Well?"

"He has raised hell," said the scaler.

"How's that?"

"Everybody is discharge. The men are very angry. They say they could have got jobs on the south shore, maybe, for the winter, but now it's too late."

"Baptiste, can't you get it through your head that I give the orders here?" asked Hilary. "Go and tell the men that the only person who has been discharged is Mr. Morris."

"Ah, yes, *monsieur*. But, you see, Mr. Morris he pay the men their wages."

Hilary took Baptiste by the arm and led him out of the office. A group of men with sullen looks were eagerly discussing the situation.

"Call them here," said Hilary.

"Now tell them what I have told you," he continued, as the lumbermen began to draw about him.

For a few minutes the air was full of a babel of excited voices. The little scaler began a dozen explanations, and finally turned to Hilary.

"You know, *monsieur*, you own the property all right," he said, "but M. Brousseau, he hires the mill hands. These are the mill workers. That is why it is hard for them; they ain't lumbermen unless they got to be."

"Explain to them that it is my mill. Tell them that the mill hands will be hired by me, and that they can go back to their jobs."

Another chattering followed.

"The men say, if that's so, why is Lafe Connell discharge?" announced the scaler.

"What?" cried Hilary.

"He go right away for to catch the boat home before she leave," said Jean Baptiste. "See, M. Askew!"

Hilary looked up. On the crest of the hill behind the cascade of Rocky River was a solitary figure, striding swiftly, bag in hand.

The down boat for Quebec was almost due. Looking seaward, Hilary saw the white hull rounding the point, and the black smoke from her funnels, an inverted cone against the heavens. Evidently Lafe was homeward bound; but what had happened Hilary could not imagine.

He jumped into the buggy and urged the horse through the still disputing crowd. But then he remembered that he had forgotten to lock the office door, and he had to go back, toss Baptiste the key, and wait for it to be returned to him. When he started again the boat was appreciably nearer.

He had to take the shaky bridge slowly, and then there was the hill, which could only be surmounted at a walk. The horse was tired, too. Arriving at the summit, Hilary heard the hoot of the vessel, and saw it near by, turning to take the wharf with the tide. Lafe was nowhere to be seen along the expanse of the cliff road, visible as far as the descent to the hotel.

Hilary whipped the horse, something he hated to do; but now it was imperative. Without Lafe he felt that his chances of success were almost hopeless.

He drove madly along the cliff and down the slope. As he reached the stable he saw the mooring ropes cast out and made secure.

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M. Tremblay was standing at the stable door, smoking his pipe and gazing ruminatingly at the pig that he was fattening for the Christmas killing. Hilary flung him the reins, sprang out, and ran down to the wharf.

A few passengers were gathered about the little baggage office, and others were standing before the gangway, waiting to embark. Among them was Lafe with a a great carpet-bag in his hand. Hilary flung himself upon him just as he set foot upon the planks.

Lafe spun around and looked angrily at him. Hilary held his arm.

"What's the matter, Lafe?" he asked.

"Oh, shucks!" said Lafe. "Just let go of me, will you, Mr. Askew?"

"What are you deserting for?"

"What that you say?" demanded Lafe ferociously. "Deserting who? I guess I don't have to stay here after I've been fired, do I, even if my contract has a little time to run? Just let go of my arm!"

The passengers had embarked; the sailors stood waiting for Lafe before pulling back the gangway.

"Come back to your senses, Lafe," said Hilary. "I haven't fired you, and I want notice before you go off like that."

"*Dépêchez-vous donc, monsieur!*" called the captain.

"Last call for dinner," said Lafe grimly. "Will you leave go of me, Mr. Askew?"

"No!" shouted Hilary. "It's all right, captain. He isn't coming."

The sailors pulled in the gangway. The ropes were cast off. The water was churned into froth as the ship backed away. Lafe, who had made no serious effort to resist, flung his bag angrily upon the planks.

"Now suppose you tell me what the trouble is," said Hilary.

"What right you got to stop me?" demanded Lafe. "Now I got to wait in this God-forsaken place until Saturday, alongside of Mr. Tremblay's pink veranda. Say, if it hadn't been I knew you meant well, I don't know what I mightn't have done to you."

"What's happened, Lafe?"

"What's happened? Didn't you tell me you were going to hold fast? And didn't you tell Morris every word I'd said to you about him and Brousseau?"

"Not one word, Lafe."

"Then how'd he know?"

"Suspected it. Pumped you. And then fired you, I suppose."

"You got it. I thought you was going to fire Morris, and he fires me and orders me off the concession. That's a grand way to start standing by your word, Mr. Askew!"

"I have discharged Mr. Morris."

"What?" yelled Lafe, spinning round.

"After we'd had a talk, Lafe. And I guess he threw that bluff to get you out of the way quickly, because you know too much. It nearly worked, too! Lafe, tell me, what made you make that crazy dash for the boat?"

"Because I thought you'd weakened, and I'm sick to death of this darned country," answered Lafe. "Because I can't stand the people, or the climate, or the verandas, or them out-of-shape schooners, or Father Lucy praying out fires. I'm sick of it, Mr. Askew, and Clarice—my wife—and the kids are in Shoeburyport. That's why. I guess," he said, looking at Hilary plaintively, "I guess my feelings kind of got the better of me when I thought you'd given way."

Hilary thumped him on the shoulder. "That's all right, Lafe," he said; "but you're going to sign on with me for a year—just one year more; and as soon as things get straightened out, you shall go home for a two-months' vacation on salary. And you're going to sign on as manager, in Morris's place."

Lafe looked at him as if it was all a dream. Lafe had been working for forty dollars a week since his arrival at St. Boniface.

"Mr. Askew," he said, when he could keep his voice steady, "I guess I've been ungrateful. But when Morris told me I was discharged, I naturally took him at his word. It didn't seem reasonable to me that you really meant to stay, though I did believe you when you spoke yesterday. I couldn't see how you could stand for St. Boniface, with your education, and your

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chances in your own country. But I'll stay, Mr. Askew, and I'll do all I can to help clean up this mess and put things on a paying foundation."

Hilary held out his hand. "We'll shake on that," he said. "You accept the post, Lafe, and you won't make a break for home again?"

"Never again, so long as we're on the job together," answered Lafe.

CHAPTER V.

A NEIGHBORLY ERRAND.

WITHIN the next few days Hilary had got hold of the outlines of the business. He spent many hours with Connell in the office, going over the books. It soon became clear to them that, while Morris had been bleeding the St. Boniface tract to death for the benefit of the Ste. Marie Company, it was very difficult to detect any evidence of actual fraud.

The mill-charges, upkeep, wages, teams, and stabling were the principal items in the expenditure. Then there was the question of freight. The Ste. Marie Company owned two steam-tugs, which towed the barges laden with lumber down to Quebec. The St. Boniface Company had been dependent upon a couple of schooners owned by an old river captain named Dupont.

The timber was cut in the simplest and most primitive method. Want of capital compelled contracting for tracts with the jobbers, consisting of Leblanc and four assistants, who were paid a royalty of two dollars a cord. There was a contract for driving the wood down Rocky River, which ate further into the receipts.

Hilary evolved a method by which he calculated that he might just manage to carry through the winter, if he could get out a large shipment of lumber before navigation closed early in December.

But this involved the satisfactory renewal of the jobbers' contracts. He was confident that Leblanc, who, with his assistants, leased two thousand acres, could cut ten cords to the acre, and that the average of four cords shown on the books meant in some way that a large quantity of lumber had found its way into the possession of the Ste. Marie Company.

As the Ste. Marie Company was sitting tight and doing very little cutting, it was morally certain that Leblanc had simply transferred the St. Boniface timber to Brousseau, who had floated it down the river and put it through the mill. The show of activity in that part of the Ste. Marie limits opposite Leblanc's camp confirmed this view.

"It's as sure as anything can be," said Lafe. "But what's the use? Morris kept my nose to the grindstone, and if I had gone into the woods, I couldn't get any one to understand me, and I'd have been fired if I'd tried to find out what was doing."

"I'll send for Leblanc and have a talk with him," said Hilary. "He must be getting anxious about his renewal, anyway."

Lafe agreed that this might be advisable.

Leblanc came into the office later that day with his truculent air, fixing Hilary with one eye and the wall with the other. He sat down, decided to take off his hat, and deposited it on the floor between his feet.

"You wanted to see me, and I was coming, anyway," he announced.

"I want to know why you only cut four cords to the acre last year," said Hilary.

Leblanc let his eyes wander crookedly about the office.

"You're fixed pretty comfortably here," he said. "I guess it's true you fired Mr. Morris, eh? All right; I'll sign on with you."

"You'd better answer my question, Leblanc."

Leblanc picked up his hat and twirled it on his knee, smiling sourly.

"You see here, young fellow," he answered; "you don' know the lumber game. You fire Mr. Morris, who knew his business, an' now you want to pick a quarrel with me. How the hell you suppose I'm going to pay my hands an' make profit if I cut three-inch trees, eh?"

"You could cut ten cords to the acre without going below the government limit," said Hilary. "I haven't seen your old

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contract territory, but I guess you didn't pick worthless land to cut over."

Leblanc threw back his head and laughed heartily, probably at his memories.

"You sure don' know much of this business," he chuckled. "You t'ink you cut ten cords to the acre up this way? You t'ink you can pick quarrel with me like that? You get another jobber. I can go work for M. Brousseau."

"Very good," said Hilary. "Good afternoon."

Leblanc got up, nonplused. He moved uncertainly toward the door and stopped.

"You don' want me?" he demanded. "Why, I got my camp ready and gangs all ready to start work next month. Mr. Morris agree to sign new contrac' wit' me."

"Go to Brousseau."

"You see here, I got to have that contrac'," shouted Leblanc. "Mr. Morris he promise it to me, an' I got my gangs."

"You seem to want it pretty badly, after all, Leblanc," said Hilary quietly. "Well, if you feel that way, I don't want to go back on Morris's promise. But you'll agree to cut three thousand cords a month from November first and deliver them at the skidways beside the creek and Rocky River."

Leblanc scowled and thought swiftly.

"I take it," he muttered sullenly, after a moment or two.

A new contract was made out and signed, one clause containing the provision that the agreement should become void in the event of Leblanc failing to deliver the stipulated three thousand cords monthly from November first, except in the case of open weather, which would make hauling impossible.

Hilary was jubilant. He was assured of three thousand cords from the jobbers, apart from his own cutting, by November 30, and with reasonable weather he could get this down to the mill and ship it before navigation closed.

But Leblanc was jubilant also. He had secured a good tract, with a long panhandle running in toward St. Boniface, which he had demanded on the ground that there was a fine growth of black spruce along the bottoms there.

As it was to Hilary's advantage to facilitate Leblanc's operations, no objection had been raised to this, and the two men parted on tolerable terms.

Hilary was now assured of nearly one-half of the required income on a monthly average until the summer, when the operations in the woods would, of course, come to an end.

He ought never to have agreed to Leblanc's panhandle. In that he came to see Brousseau's first move—a little one, but significant of what was to be expected. Returning to the office a few days later, after a journey into the concession, he found Baptiste and half a dozen of the men outside the door in a state of excitement.

"The seigneur have been here, *monsieur!*" exclaimed the little scaler. "He raises hell wit' everyt'ing."

Lafe came out, looking a little flushed, and Hilary turned to him for an explanation.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"It's about Leblanc's new territory," said Lafe. "You've given him a wedge of land running down almost to the village."

"Yes. What of it?"

"Why that map in the office doesn't show the château. We've got cutting rights over the entire seigniory, but of course it was understood that there'd be no cutting on the strip of land running round the château, and Leblanc's lease goes into Mr. Rosny's back garden.

"Leblanc has started cutting there, within sight of the château windows. The old gentleman wanted to know if you weren't gentleman enough to cut the rest of the territory first, anyway. Lord, Mr. Askew, you ought to have seen the hands cringe when he cussed 'em out! I guess this feudal game is still running pretty strong in St. Boniface."

Hilary felt very serious about this situation. He saw at once that Brousseau had set this trap for him in order to embroil him with the seigneur, already ill-disposed, and the most potent influence in St. Boniface. He determined to lose no time in making his apologies and in getting Leblanc out.

He took the rig and drove over the

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bridge, up the hill, and along the branch road until he saw the château before him. Blazed trees along the roadway indicated that Leblanc had already set his boundary there unmistakably.

The great trees, which had evidently once formed an avenue, but now raised their heads above a dense undergrowth of birch and fir, ended a thousand feet in front of the long, rambling, wooden structure, which, unpainted for years, seemed to be crumbling into decay.

Over the approach where the garden had been, the former terraces, still faintly indicated by undulations, an army of little pines, thrust out from the forest like an advance guard, was winning its way.

The grass was thick between the ruts of the track where the wide, winding road had been.

Hilary stopped in front of a flight of crumbling stone steps, tied the horse, ascended, and rapped.

A very old man, wearing a faded butler's uniform, came to the door. As he opened it a shaft of sunlight fell on the passage wall, revealing a line of portraits that looked out from their tarnished frames.

"M. Rosny?" asked Hilary.

The old man mumbled and led the way toward the rear of the corridor. A door at the end opened, and the seigneur came into the passage.

He was a tall and very strong old man, with white peaked beard and apple-red cheeks, still fresh as a boy's. M. Rosny wore a brown swallowtail coat, tight trousers strapped under well-polished boots, and a spreading collar such as has not been seen in a generation. Yet the man suited his ancient costume as the old house suited him.

Hilary went up to him.

"I am Mr. Askew," he said "I heard that you had been to the mill, and I called to offer my explanations."

"Will you kindly come in?" inquired the seigneur.

He ushered Hilary into the room at the end of the corridor. It was a combination of breakfast-room and library, and comfortably furnished in modern fashion. A pair of little white gloves that lay upon the table arrested Hilary's attention instantly.

The seigneur walked toward the window.

"Have the goodness to listen, sir," he said.

Hilary could hear the sound of the distant ax-strokes.

"Those are your men," said M. Rosny with extreme bitterness. "They are cutting down the trees which my grandfather planted—not the wild trees of the forest, but those that he set out around his home. What is there to explain, sir?"

"I am sorry for it," said Hilary placatingly. "I leased a tract to my head jobber, but I did not know that it extended to your home."

"A plague on your jobber, sir!" cried Rosny. "I know nothing of jobs or jobbers, but when I sold my timber rights to your uncle, I did not even stipulate for a reservation about my home. I took his courtesy for granted. Mr. Morris respected the custom. But you, sir—"

"Made a mistake in ignorance—"

"Not ignorance, sir, but heedlessness, M. Askew!" stormed the old man. "You are not satisfied to come here and ruin my land, but you must bring your infernal business within sight and sound of me!"

"I shall do my best to end the nuisance, M. Rosny, and I believe I shall succeed," replied Hilary, restraining his growing resentment. "It was my hope to establish neighborly relations, but—"

The door opened and Hermine Rosny came in. She wore a white waist and riding skirt, and her brown hair was tumbling about her shoulders. She carried a little riding-whip in her hand.

"Allow me to present to you M. Askew, the new owner of the timber upon our land," said the seigneur grimly.

She opened her lips, but no sound came from them. Perhaps the evident anger in her eyes made speech momentarily impossible. Hilary saw that they were not blue at all, but of an unfathomable grayness, like the gray St. Lawrence, yet curiously rimmed with blue, which sometimes seemed the dominant tone and sometimes the merest edging to their depths. She tapped her boot quickly with the whip-stock.

"M. Askew has come to offer his explanations," he added.

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The girl turned to Hilary and spoke in tones of repressed indignation.

"So it was not enough, *monsieur*, that you should have to cut down our forests, but you must needs also take our own few trees about the château!" she said. "Is it for the few dollars more that they will bring? Perhaps my father will buy them back from you."

"Mlle. Rosny, that is unjust," said Hilary vehemently. "It was an error, and it was to excuse myself I came here."

"We do not wish to hear your excuses, *monsieur*," she answered. "Have you Americans no country of your own that you must swarm across our borders and ravage ours? Cut, then; hurry your work and go, and leave us our solitude, at least."

"M. Rosny!" protested Hilary, bewildered by her anger.

"My daughter is right, *monsieur!*" thundered the old man. "I should have sold my timber to one of our own people. Your excuses are not accepted. Have the goodness to end them."

"I shall not attempt to repeat them," said Hilary. "There remains only this to say: I am on my way to rectify the mistake."

"Ah, do not listen to him, father," cried Hermine. "At least his rights stop upon the threshold of our home."

"Very true, *mademoiselle*," said Hilary, turning toward the door. "M. Rosny, I came here on a neighborly errand, and you have chosen to misjudge me. I came to offer reparation for an unintended offense, and you have converted it into a studied action dictated by greed. I shall offer no further explanations. Good day, *monsieur;* and you, *mademoiselle!*"

He turned upon his heel, pushed the door open, and went out. As he passed Hermine Rosny he saw that she clutched at the table-edge with fingers white to the knuckles; she was looking at him as if he were a serf, and yet he could see that her own humiliation, created by her injustice, stung her most deeply. The seigneur's anger had evaporated. He took two steps forward and seemed about to speak, perhaps to offer reparation.

But Hilary was striding through the hall. As he entered the buggy he saw the old butler at the door, waiting for his departure.

He heard the door close as he drove down the weed-grown avenue.

CHAPTER VI.

A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

THE horse galloped as if it feared its driver's anger. Soon the château was out of sight in the distance. Half-way down the road Hilary drew rein. Anxious as he was to get beyond the private grounds, Hilary did not wish to return immediately to St. Boniface.

On his journey he had seen a track that cut out of the branch road in the direction of Rocky River. He resolved to take this, which he imagined led to the mill, in order to examine the timber along this route.

He noticed with approval the splendid growth of red pine. It was a great timber country; Hilary had already come to that conclusion, and to this—that, properly managed, the St. Boniface tract had in it the possibility of excellent profits. In spite of frequent fires, much of the growth was of considerable size, and much of the second growth would come to maturity before the territory had been cut over.

After driving for nearly half an hour he emerged from the trees into a burned-over district from which he could see for a considerable distance in every direction. He stopped the horse and looked about to get his bearings.

Far away was the gulf, and, farther than he had supposed, the black cabins of the village, with the streaky line of the mill flume, running down to the wharf. Immediately before him was the range of hills through which ran the Rocky River.

Hilary decided that the road must run down to the gorge, where it joined the main thoroughfare that led into the heart of the concession.

He rode on. The track had evidently been disused that season, and was overgrown with raspberry briers, which made progress difficult. In swampy places, which mired the horse to the fetlocks, a

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jungle of ferns had grown up since the summer rains.

The ground grew swampier, descending into a tangle of azalea-bushes, rising to the horse's shoulders. Then, just as Hilary was considering the advisability of giving up his attempt to reach the main road by this route, he saw the bridge that spanned the creek tributary to the river, a hundred yards in front of him.

Now he knew where he was. He had emerged at the place where Connell and he had turned off on their drive into the limits.

It was not far from Leblanc's new camp, and Hilary decided to have his quarrel out with the man immediately instead of waiting. Presently he began to hear the sound of axes again. Evidently Leblanc made this his headquarters, while the work round the château was purely malicious in character. Hilary felt a renewal of his anger at the thought.

When he came into the clearing he found a dozen men hard at work completing the log buildings. At his appearance there was an immediate display of interest. At that moment Hilary had a clear impression of impending trouble.

He was ready for it. He got down from the rig and tied his horse to a tree; he approached the little group that had drawn together, and he did not recognize any man from St. Boniface among the lumbermen.

"Where's Leblanc?" he demanded.

The man shrugged his shoulders and glanced toward the largest of the log-houses. Hilary followed his glance and saw Black Pierre emerging. He went toward him, and the two men met face to face and stopped.

Still without reason to believe in any hostile intention on Pierre's part, Hilary suddenly became aware that they were ringed by a narrowing circle of lumbermen.

"Morning," said Hilary, nodding. "Where's Leblanc?"

"I don't know," answered the other, scowling. "Look for him if you want him. He's your man, ain't he?"

"He is, but you are not. What are you doing here? And these men; I haven't hired them."

"What you mean?" demanded Pierre. "I work here for M. Brousseau, with his men."

Hilary saw out of the corner of his eye that the ring was rapidly contracting. It struck him that Pierre and he were posted in the attitude of prize-fighters. He tried to remember Lafe's counsel and to keep his temper. Pierre thought he was afraid; he sneered at him.

Hilary disregarded his truculent attitude.

"Last time I came here," he said, "Leblanc had taken over this territory. Now I want to know how you come to be in Leblanc's place. I haven't hired you."

"I don't know what you mean," snorted Pierre, "an' I got no time to waste in damn foolishness. This here is Ste. Marie land. M. Brousseau an' M. Morris run the Ste. Marie limits."

"The Ste. Marie limits are on the other side of the Rivière Rocheuse," said Hilary.

"Holy Name, ain't I the other side of Rivière Rocheuse? Didn't you cross the bridge?"

"That creek is not Rivière Rocheuse, as you know very well, Pierre."

Pierre thrust his face forward into Hilary's.

"Say, I got no time to waste with you," he snarled. "If you come here to fight, you say so."

"I'll give you one minute to get off this territory," said Hilary in a quiet voice that deceived, and was meant to deceive, Pierre as to his fortitude.

"You wan' to fight, eh? All right," growled the other, stripping off his jacket.

Hilary had just time to fasten the top button of his coat when Pierre, bellowing, was charging him, head down, his arms working like flails. He made short, vicious jabs at him; he was muscle-bound and could not extend the arm with much force; but any of those short strokes, delivered from a leg-of-mutton shoulder, would have gone home with terrible momentum.

Hilary stepped aside and gave Pierre a short uppercut with his left. Pierre went reeling past him, tripped over a projecting root, and fell sprawling upon the ground.

He was up again in a moment, rushing at Hilary. Despite the blows that were driven

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home in quick succession and at once covered his face with blood, he managed to get in two body deliveries that knocked the wind out of Hilary and forced him backward.

Hilary had boxed occasionally at college; that was several years before, but the instinct came back to him.

"It's footwork that wins," his teacher had told him.

And that was especialiy needed here.

Quicker than the *habitant*, but fighting in a ring which gave and drew in before the contestants, but was never more than a few feet in diameter, Hilary was unable to hold off the clinch except by the utmost agility.

He stepped from side to side, guarding himself dexterously against Pierre's furious rushes, and evading them, until the opportunity for a telling cross-counter with the right arrived. Hilary put all his weight into the blow, and Pierre went down a second time.

He rose, spitting the blood out of his mouth, and came at Hilary again. This time Pierre took his punishment grimly, and succeeded in locking his arms about him in spite of an uppercut before the grip closed.

Pierre reeled, but did not let go. He grasped Hilary like a bear, hugging him till the breath was nearly out of his body, and forcing the point of his chin in under the clavicle till the pain was intense.

The woodsmen, who had anticipated a swift victory for their leader, jostled the pair as they wrestled to and fro.

There are no rules in lumber-camp fighting. Pierre was looking for a foul chance, and Hilary was preparing for it, knowing that it would be used.

He gradually shifted his grasp upward, first pinioning Hilary's arm, then gripping his shoulder. Of a sudden he had him by the throat with both his hands.

Hilary saw the faces of the lumbermen swim about him. He saw the triumph, the mockery, and the hate on each; there was no pity for the American; many an old land trouble, many a racial conflict had become incarnate again in that fight under the pines.

Hilary saw that he was no longer fighting for the timber tract, but for his life.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Beware of Imitations

by Annie Cameron

ABALONE BEACH was crowded in August, but now it was November, and the white sands stretched for miles without a footprint, past the shuttered cottages of the summer people that faced the ocean. Over a block or two, where land was cheaper, were the humbler abodes of the year-round people; the men who ran the launches, the storekeeper, the small concessionaires, a few fishermen, and Ellen Wilkins and her mother, who kept boarders in summer and vegetated in winter.

Ellen was one of those matronly middle-

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aged spinsters whose spinsterhood seems so obviously a mistake on the part of Nature, who had made her serene and amply proportioned and endowed her with domestic talents to the extent of genius. She, who wouldn't have known a feminist if one had stepped on her corn, felt in an inarticulate way that the law of supply and demand had shelved her.

Summers gave her little time for philosophy, but she rebelled in the eventless winter days with only her querulous mother, whose continual complaint was that if it were not for Ellen, she could keep house for Lon, her favorite first-born, who was doing well in the drug business in Bakersfield.

The old woman was harping on her favorite theme this November afternoon while she and Ellen walked down the wave-mined boardwalk to give their overfed, wheezing pug dog an airing.

"'Tain't right that a good, steady boy like Lon should have to board around while he's got a mother to keep house for him. He says to me only last time he was down: 'If ever Ellen should get married—which ain't likely—you and me can live in the rooms over the drug store.' What's more, you know this damp climate is bad for my asthma."

She broke off to call shrilly at the dog, which had got thirty feet away.

"Daisy Belle! Daisy Belle! Look at her getting her paws wet chasing them gulls. That's your fault, Ellen. If you watch your chances the way you watch that dog, no wonder you're an old maid."

The asthmatic pug waddled up to them with the pink bow on her collar drabbled and her paws wet.

"Mother's precious! Did her wet her feet? Wipe them off on your handkerchief, Ellen."

Ellen hesitated as she looked at the neat square of linen.

"Hurry up! She's shivering."

Accustomed as she was to playing maid to Daisy Belle, Ellen felt that there were limits. A yellowed newspaper lay in a nearby yard.

"I'll dry them on that paper," she said, and while her mother held the dog she went after the paper as rapidly as she could, for Ellen was not built on racing lines.

A heading caught her eye as she stooped over—"*Wedding Bells*. A Journal Devoted to the Lonely."

With a guilty look over her shoulder, she slipped the paper inside her sweater.

"Well, what kept you so long? The pore little lamb is just shaking."

Ellen took her clean handkerchief from her pocket and wiped Daisy Belle's paws.

"I guess this will dry them better than that stiff paper," she said.

Behind locked bedroom doors that night Ellen adjusted her gold-rimmed spectacles and read the altruistic *Wedding Bells* from beginning to end.

"Why be lonely," demanded the editor, "when a true heart beats for you somewhere?" ("Why, indeed?" echoed Ellen.) "Our advertisers are mostly wealthy widows, and society ladies, and prominent business men." (If such people availed themselves of the kindly journal, why need she hesitate?) "No triflers need apply. Our fee is moderate, just enough to pay expenses." ("I guess the heathen in India can get along without my missionary dues this year," she mused, with her feet on the toboggan and the skids greased under her.)

After reading and rereading the advertisements she selected by elimination one rancher of fifty, who described his person and properties with more seemly reticence than the Adonises and Plutos who advertised for "a woman with available cash."

To him she painfully composed a letter, with the help of the Lord and a complete letter writer, and mailed it with the requisite dollar, in care of *Wedding Bells*.

She hesitated a little over the signature. Ellen Wilkins was unalluring, stodgy; but she was one of the rare lucky mortals gifted with a mellifluous middle name. E. Arline Wilkins was intriguing enough to suit any one.

In due season her rancher answered, cautiously but clearly in earnest.

His name was Ezra Cooper, and he was a yearling widower with a ten-acre producing date grove in the desert. He was doing well and wanted a wife, one who was a good cook, a Protestant, and not afraid

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of work. If the description interested her, would she please reply and enclose a photograph. He would return the favor on his next visit to town.

Ellen laid down the letter and studied her Samantha Allen face in the mirror with a growing conviction that a good photograph of her would gum up the deal.

"I've got the kind of a face that a tramp likes to see at the back door, or that makes a blind beggar push out his cup when I come down the street, or that makes babies stop crying, but it's not the kind people write pomes to. I might send an old picture, but the only difference in you twenty years ago, Ellen Wilkins, was that then you were scrawny."

She rummaged the family album without much success. That picture of Susie Hayes might do, but them bustles did look awful queer now. Cousin Gussie's wife—humph! cross-eyed. There was a nice tintype of Cousin Bessie, but the fact that it was taken in her wedding-dress, with her hand on the groom's shoulder, disqualified her. If the photographer had had gumption enough to take the freckles off Bertha's picture, it wasn't so bad.

All in all, there were no candidates for the Queen of the Carnival among the family portraits.

"I never noticed before what an awful plain bunch we were," murmured Ellen, fastening the brass clasps that caged her relatives.

She yawned as she took the hairpins out of her thin, straight hair, and then her yawn ceased with a snap, and a gleam lighted her pleasant near-sighted eyes as they focused on a framed picture that hung beside her dresser; a photograph that embodied in eyes and mouth and hair, particularly in hair, that pulchritude that was minus X in Ellen's personal equation.

"Land of Goshen!" she breathed. "I'll send him that!" And, like the little red hen of primer fame, "she did."

Her correspondent's reception of the photograph was gratifying but embarrassing in the face of the facts. The temperature of his letters warmed up from about sixty-five degrees to ninety in the shade—and no shade.

The "some time" of his letters became an impetuous "soon," and his letters themselves weekly affairs. When he should have finished packing his dates and secured a trusty man to manage his irrigating, he would hasten to his little curly-locks on the first stage. The painful pleasure of those letters!

A harried look appeared in Ellen's eyes sometimes, after long gazing in the glass, she was known to whack viciously at Daisy Belle for no reason at all. Once, behind locked doors, she tried to do her hair in tumbling curls, like the miserable picture, with appalling results.

Then came a letter announcing the date he would arrive, a scant two weeks off. The adjustments of that day offered sufficient problems to Ellen without her mother's presence.

She knew she just couldn't talk with ma there, even if ma would keep still long enough to let her; and ma would find out about *Wedding Bells* and everything.

Forthwith she began to suggest to ma the pleasures of a visit to Lon in Bakersfield, but the old lady belonged to a generation when a journey was a fearsome thing, to be undertaken after weeks of prayerful consideration of time-tables, and by the time she finally embarked, it was Thursday night, and *Lochinvar* was to arrive from his desert fastness on Saturday. That gave Ellen Friday for a trip to the city for munitions of war; strange and inept ordnance to which she brought a recruit's hand.

There was a cluster of curls, bought wondrously cheap because the dye shortage had played a weird prank in their coloring that wouldn't show—not so awful much—by lamplight. There was a new and becoming blue silk dress; and in the deepest corner of Ellen's bulgy hand-bag was a small, round box that said "Dawn of the Morning. Cannot be Detected." Oh, Ellen, how could you!

She held a dress rehearsal that night, adjusting the greenish-brownish curls as nearly like the fraudulent photograph as she could remember, and trying with unskilled fingers to blend the undetectable dawn of the morning—herald of a rainy day—with her own floridness.

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"I look like corn beef an' cabbage served with whipped cream," she said, with her broad, likable grin.

She rose betimes on the fatal morn to dust a spotless house and do magic things with eggs and flour and butter, but Lucifer, god of matches, watched over her with tongue in cheek.

Her bread rose like truth crushed to earth—slowly and dejectedly when watched and making an awful mess when least expected. An excited neighbor child ran in upon her just as she was scraping up the sponge in back of the stove.

"Oh, Miss Wilkins, mamma says come quick. The baby's swallowed a thimble."

Without waiting even to wipe her hands, Ellen loped across back yards.

When, after an hour of swinging the baby by its heels and pouring pints of medicine down its poor, little, protesting throat, the suspected thimble was found under the bed, Ellen merely sighed and remarked, "Oh, that's all right, Mis' Jones. It's harder on the baby than it is on me. I know the words for swearing, and it only knows the tune."

It was noon by the kitchen clock when she got back.

"I'll just scrub up this floor before I get dressed. He won't get here before the two-six," she said as she prepared a pail of lathery suds.

She was wedged in behind the stove scrubbing valiantly at the bread dough, which had dried on the pipes, when the doorbell rang.

"Plague take it! I'll bet it's a pedler. Ouch, my elbow!" she muttered, backing through the suds.

You who read have sensed the awful truth that it was Mr. Cooper's cue to enter. Not so Ellen, as she wiped her soapy hands on her checked apron, though the wide Stetson, the celluloid collar, the desert-seasoned face all proclaimed the man.

"Good morning," he said. "Does Miss Wilkins live here?"

"I'm Miss Wilkins."

"Pleased to meet you, Mis' Wilkins. I guess it's your daughter I want to see—Miss Arline Wilkins."

(And, now, if that orchestra leader knows his business at all he will switch from "Mornin', Si" to "Hearts and Flowers," with a slithering minor, and vamp till Ellen gets her breath.)

Ellen's acting was of the restrained, modern type. She merely swallowed once or twice, and gripped the door-handle as she answered: "Arline Wilkins? *Arline?* I never heard that name in Abalone Beach."

"Is there any other family of Wilkinses in town?"

"Not unless they're summer people."

Ezra rubbed his chin with the gesture of one used to a little stubble there.

"Funny thing! I had a letter from her only last week. She knew I was coming, too. Well, I might as well be going if she don't live here."

"The next trolley don't leave till two-twenty-nine," said Ellen. "You better come in and set down."

Ezra removed his hat and entered the cool spotlessness of the parlor.

"I'll thank you for a glass of water, ma'am. Well, well, it beats all. Look, here's her letter: 'Glad to see'—no, here: 'Third house on Tuna Avenue, round the corner from the store.' Ain't that this house?"

"Yes," said Ellen faintly, her mind on her wasted preparedness.

She fished for suitable words to announce herself to him as Arline, but his next speech changed her mind.

"She was an awful pretty girl. I'll show you her picture. Maybe you'll remember seeing her around here." He searched and researched his pockets. "Shucks! I've gone and lost it. She has big, coaxing, innocent eyes, and the nicest smile. And teeth—sa-ay. And dimples. Her hair just hangs in big, loose curls that you'd like to slip around your fingers. She's only a little thing—weighs about a hundred and ten."

And Ellen, catching sight of her reflection, knew that Arline had sunk into a kind oblivion from which she must rise no more. If only she had not sent that fair, false picture!

After he had gone, who shall censure her for the big, slow tears that ran down her face as she stuffed the Dawn of the Morning and the greenish-brownish curls into

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the kitchen stove? That done, and her retarded cleaning done, she took a comforting bath, combed her hair back decently from her plain, wholesome face, put on the blue silk dress that grinned at her from the bed, and sat on the front porch, miserably watching the sun go down behind Catalina.

She could not have told how long she had been sitting there when Ezra Cooper came back.

"Why," she gasped, wondering if he had returned to have her arrested, "I thought you went on the two-twenty-nine."

"There wa'n't any two-twenty-nine or any four-ten, either. The strike's on. Motormen and conductors."

She remembered that she had heard no cars since morning.

"They've been talking about that strike for so long that I just got used to it. I never thought they'd ever have it," she said. "What are you going to do?"

"Stay here till it's over. It's a right nice beach, and the March northers are blowing the desert off the earth now. That ocean is real pretty."

"But where can you stay? Nothing opens up here till May."

"Well, that's what I came to ask you about. They rented me one of those tent rooms down at the hotel and they said you took boarders in summer."

"We-ell, I suppose I could," she wavered, with a guilty realization that she alone was responsible for his presence. "I'll go right in now and cook supper. You must be starved."

So it came about after all that Mr. Cooper sat down to the crisp fried chicken and the melting biscuits, and the vernal spring peas, and the inspired apple pie, and the clear, fragrant coffee that the late Arline Wilkins had planned for him, though plain Ellen cooked and served it.

With dessert he brought out a box of fresh dates from his hamper.

"From my ranch. I brought them for her, but shucks! you can have them!"

Since you who read have so acutely foreseen the dénouement, what need to write out the unstirring chronicles of the next two weeks, with typing fifteen cents a sheet? On the day when the first car ran into Abalone Beach after the strike, Ezra recited with painful embarrassment the story of his letter acquaintance with the perfidious Arline.

"It's too bad," sympathized Ellen.

"Too bad? No, it's darn lucky. I'm just a plain old rancher, and I'd oughta known better than to think a girl like that picture would have fitted into a desert ranch, twenty miles from town. Anyhow, I don't think I ever could respect a woman who would answer a matrimonial ad."

"I sh'd say not," recoiled Ellen.

"Her name was against her, too. Arline. What kind of a name is that for every day? A sensible woman wants a sensible name. What's your name?" he broke off.

"Ellen."

"Just Ellen?"

"Just Ellen."

"Now, *that's* a name for you. Fine name and fine woman. Ellen, could you be happy with a plain man like me?"

She was so sure that she could that the very next day they went into Los Angeles to buy the ring. Beside the jewelry store was a motion-picture show. As they passed it Ezra stopped short before a poster.

"That's her!" he said excitedly. "That's her!"

Ellen, her face crimson, tugged at his coat.

"Come on, Ezra. Oh, please come on."

But Ezra was transfixed before the billboards. "Sure, I'd know her picture anywhere."

He addressed the ticket-seller at his wicket.

"Say, young fellow, what's the name of that girl in the picture out in front?"

"Her? Mary Pickford."

"No such thing. Her name's Arline Wilkins. Why, I know her well."

He rejoined Ellen, serenely unconscious of her guilty face.

"He tried to tell me her name was Mary something or other, but it ain't. I'd know her in China. She thought she'd have some fun with me, but I fooled her." He beamed fondly at Ellen. "You bet I fooled her."

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Where's the Woman

by Fred Jackson

Author of "A Full House," "The Diamond Necklace," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

ANN STONINGTON, at a bridge-party, sees her sister Cora's husband, James Kaine, strike her before her friends. On reaching home she tells her brother Ted, who insists he will go at once to the Kaines' and settle with his brother-in-law, who is given to drink. But he tells her next morning that, finding the house dark, he didn't go in. She herself makes an early call, and finds Jim Kaine dead on the floor of her sister's room and Cora vanished. The doctor says it is a case of poison, either murder or suicide, and Ann at once telephones for Arthur Raines, an acquaintance, who has taken up the work of a consulting detective as a fad. He comes to her at Kaines', and summons Agnes, an old servant in the Kaine family and Cora's maid, who tells how her master had her watch and report on all Cora's movements each day.

"I thought he was asleep at first," she finishes, "but when I saw his face, I knew he was dead, and I guessed who had done it."

CHAPTER V.

CLUES.

"PLEASE," said Raines quietly, "I did not ask for your theories concerning the murder."

"I guessed who had done it, just the same," repeated Agnes, "and there's others in this house that guess, too. We all knew she hated him. All she wanted was his money. Even he knew that before the honeymoon was over!"

"That will do, Agnes. You may go," said Ann.

Agnes turned toward the door without answering, but on the threshold she launched one more barbed arrow.

"He had his reasons for watching her, you may be sure," she said. "Mr. Jim never did anything without good reason!"

With that, she departed, closing the door behind her less quietly than she had closed it before.

Raines and Ann regarded each other thoughtfully.

"Why do you suppose he did have her watched?" asked Raines.

"Because he was insanely jealous of her. He knew that she did not love him, and he was afraid she would find some one she could come to care for."

"And did she justify that fear?"

"Not to my knowledge," answered Ann. "Although there were men enough willing to succor her."

Raines sat silent an instant, thinking.

"You say," he asked then, after a pause, "that Kaine struck her last night at Mrs. Clarke's house. Why did he do that? What lead up to it. Did they quarrel over any one?"

"No. He saw her taking money from Dick Cochrane in settlement of the score, and he objected."

"Do you suppose he understood that the money was her winnings at cards?"

This story began in The Argosy for October 6.

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"Oh, yes, he understood that," said Ann. "But he had a mania for keeping money from her. I didn't tell you that, did I? He gave her all the clothes and jewels and furs she wanted. He kept three cars at her disposal. He opened charge-accounts for her at department stores, candy stores, fruit stores, florists', book-shops, and taxi stands. She could buy anything she pleased and send him the bill. She could even order theater and opera boxes from the speculators in his name. But she could not carry money about in her purse. She had nothing of her own in the bank. He never gave her a penny of actual cash!"

"Why was that?" asked Raines.

"Because he did not trust her, I suppose. He did not choose to render her independent of him. So long as she lived with him as his wife, she could live in luxury, but not an instant longer."

"Then you think the fact that Cochrane was giving her the money had nothing to do with his striking her?"

"Nothing, I am sure. He tore the money up, you know. He did not turn upon Dick Cochrane until after Dick had knocked him down in Cora's defense!"

"Oh! Cochrane knocked him down? You did not tell me that!"

"Yes. They would have had a dreadful fight if they hadn't been separated."

"Well! Was Cochrane actuated by the disgust any man would feel in seeing another man strike a woman, or was he especially concerned because Cora was the woman?"

"I can't say, as to that," admitted Ann. "Of course he's always been in love with Cora. But so many men have. And Dick always has been a very chivalrous man!"

He sat silent an instant longer, deep in thought, then quite suddenly he gathered his notes together and rose.

"Well," he said, "I think that is about all I can learn by questioning, just at this moment. I wonder if I might have a peep into the room?"

"I think so," replied Ann. "Why not? You will disturb nothing, I know. Dr. Graham impressed upon me the necessity of leaving everything as it is there, until the coroner has been in!"

"Ordinarily," answered Raines, "that is a splendid idea, when a death has occurred under suspicious circumstances. But in this case, considering that I am working in the interest of your sister, it might become advisable to disturb something!"

"I don't think I quite understand," said Ann.

"I mean, suppose we should be on the ground first, and should find a clue that is not to your sister's credit?"

Ann frowned.

"Would you destroy any evidence that seemed to point to her? Should I have gone through the room carefully long before this?"

"It might not have been a bad plan," Raines admitted, "since we have your sister's welfare at heart, and not the cause of justice nor yet the interests of the Kaine family."

"Come, then," said Ann eagerly. "Not that I doubt her innocence. Please, please understand that. I feel that she couldn't be guilty of such an atrocious crime. But it does no harm to be on the safe side, does it?"

"No," said he. "That is quite the sensible way to look at it!"

She sighed and cast him a grateful glance. Then, opening the door softly, she led the way out and along the corridor to the boudoir where Jim Kaine still lay outstretched upon the floor.

There was no one to see, as Ann drew the key from her pocket and unlocked the door. There was no one to see them enter and close themselves in.

Ann stood motionless just across the threshold, but Raines advanced and knelt down beside the lifeless figure of the man who had defeated him in the contest for Cora Stonington's heart and hand.

He removed the white cloth that covered the face and studied its expression. He sniffed close to the open mouth as Dr. Graham had done. He examined the eyeballs. Then he replaced the cloth and began to search through the dead man's pockets. What he found he carefully marked down upon his notes.

There was a wallet full of bills. There was a bunch of keys. There was a gold

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pocket-knife. There was a watch with Cora's picture in the back, and a cigar-cutter set with diamonds for a charm. There were some cigars, and there was some loose change.

Replacing everything but the bunch of keys, Raines rose and passed into the adjoining bed-chamber—the one that Kaine had occupied. There, he crossed to the bureau and found a key on the key-ring that would fit one of the drawers. Inserting this key, he unlocked the drawer, and opened it part way.

He saw a brace of revolvers in a morocco case, a bundle of photographs, some old letters, and various other odds and ends. Leaving the drawer open, the keys hanging from the lock, the contents of the drawer intact, he turned away and looked about him.

The bed was undisturbed, as Ann had said, a pair of silk pajamas were neatly folded up on a chair at one side. A lounge robe of heavy blue velvet was thrown over the foot of the bed, and Kaine's slippers rested just beneath it.

On the bed itself, Kaine's top-coat was lying. His silk hat stood upon the mantelpiece with his white gloves beside it.

Raines picked up the heavy fur overcoat. He found nothing but a handkerchief in the pockets.

Replacing it exactly as it had been before, he went back into Cora's room again and looked about him.

"Do you recall the gown your sister wore last night, and the cloak?" he asked Ann quietly.

"Yes," said Ann.

"Will you look into the dressing-room and see if they are there?"

Ann crossed the room and disappeared into the draped doorway of the cupboard-room where Cora's innumerable gowns and hats and wraps were hung in glass cases. Left alone, Raines approached Cora's dressing-table.

There, amid an array of gold-topped jars and bottles and quaint-shaped boxes, he had caught sight of an open champagne bottle.

There was a glass beside it—a water goblet, with traces of the wine at the bottom. On the floor, near the dressing-table, was a champagne glass smashed to bits. It also had contained wine, for some had spilled out upon the rose-colored rug. The bottle itself was empty.

Raines picked up the bottle and sniffed at the neck of it. Then he did the same thing with the goblet, and with some fragments of the kitchen glass on the floor. As he finished, and arose from his knees, Ann came back.

"Neither the gown nor wrap is there," she announced.

"Then she fled in haste, without stopping to change," said he. "The next question is, did she make any preparations whatever?"

He glanced critically at the other ornaments of the dressing-table.

"Do you know where she kept her jewels?" he asked.

"Yes. In the jewel-safe, behind that large Venetian mirror," Ann told him.

She revealed the safe to him, even as she spoke. It was a small one, set into the wall so as to be absolutely hidden when the mirror was in place. Following her, Raines put his hand upon the safe door, asking: "Is it locked?"

But even as he spoke he discovered that it was not, for the door opened easily at his tug, and disclosed the interior of the safe, filled with jewel-cases of various sizes and shapes.

He drew the nearest one to him and opened it. It was empty. So were the others, which he and Ann examined, one by one.

"She has taken her jewels, at any rate," said Raines. "She lingered long enough for that."

Ann said nothing. In removing the last jewel-case she had come upon a crumpled ball of paper. Drawing it out, and smoothing the creases, she found that it was a letter.

"Look!" she cried softly, as she deciphered the head-lines, and raised her startled face to his.

"What is it?" asked Raines, taking it from her unresisting fingers, and then, spreading it out carefully, he read:

"'Monday afternoon!'"

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"The day before yesterday!" cried Ann, interrupting.

Then Raines went on with the letter:

"DEAREST:

"I know that I have no right to write you this or to use such a term of endearment; but, Cora, I can't endure the knowledge that you are so miserably unhappy with that brute to whom you have given yourself. To-day, at noon, when you made it so plain to me that you dared not even stop to exchange a word with me, I was simply wild. I know that you care nothing for him. And I think you still like me a little.

"For God's sake, Cora, don't sit still and do nothing to free yourself from his maddening petty tyranny! You are still young and beautiful, and you ought to be reveling in happiness, instead of suffering as I know you suffer. Are you going to sit still and wait for Heaven to free you? Are you going to throw your whole life away? Are you going to grow older and older, and finally die without having had anything?

"I know you married him of your own free will, but—good God—you were young and didn't know—didn't realize!

"Give yourself another chance! And give *me* a chance for happiness, too. I am mad about you, as I have always been! I adore you! I worship you! If you will come away with me, I swear to you by all that I hold holiest and most sacred I'll take care of you and love you and be good to you and fight for you and make you happy. I'll give up everything else on earth and aim only at that! I'll make you care for me as I care for you. I'll *make* you, Cora! And I'll make you rejoice that you were brave enough to take the step.

"You know that you can trust me and depend upon me. You've known me long enough to be sure of that! Give me the chance to make you happy. That's all I ask of you!

"You'll be at the Clarkes' to-morrow night and so shall I. During the evening you are sure to find an opportunity to whisper the word 'yes' to me, or to nod your head. I shall be on the watch for your signal all the evening, and so you may be sure I shall not miss it! If you decide to go away with me, I'll make the arrangements later—or, rather, I'll tell them to you later—for I have them all outlined in my head now.

"With all the love a man can give a woman, I must always be, dear, whether you want me or not,

"Yours,

"DICK."

Raines ceased reading and he looked up at Ann, to find her eyes shining and wet with tears. He had not realized before that she was so sweet-looking. But as she stood there, flushed, tremulous, breathing deeply, he found himself tremendously drawn to her.

"Dick Cochrane," she whispered softly. "Poor Dick!"

"Maybe not *poor* Dick," said he. "The chances are that she gave that signal, and that she's gone with him!"

"Do you think so, really?" she asked quickly.

"It looks like it!"

She stood staring into his eyes, anxiously, thoughtfully.

"At all events," he added slowly, "I think we had better destroy this very interesting evidence before the coroner gets here. It's certain to mislead people into thinking that she got rid of Kaine to clear the way for Cochrane!"

"Destroy it, then, by all means!" urged Ann.

"Don't you *dare* destroy it, my friend!" cried a strange voice grimly from the doorway, and turning swiftly, with shocked faces and wildly beating hearts, they found the hall door open and two men standing there regarding them.

One was short and stout, with a heavy-jowled pink face, and white hair. The other was much younger, and carried a small black satchel in his hand.

"I'll take that letter, if you please," added the older man, advancing.

As Raines reluctantly handed it over, with a little shrug, the newcomer examined it, raised his eyes and added: "Thank you. And now, if you please, I should like to know who you are and what you are doing in this room?"

"I am Arthur Raines," answered the detective frankly, "a friend of the Stonington family, and I represent them. This is Miss Ann Stonington—Mrs. Kaine's sister. You, I presume, are the coroner?"

"Coroner Farrel," admitted the elderly gentleman, nodding.

He looked keenly at Raines, then at Ann, and went on gravely: "I am very glad to meet you both, I am sure; but sorry to find you here, bent upon defeating the cause of justice. I am afraid I shall have

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to hold you, for the moment, for rigid examination!"

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF PUBLICITY.

ANN turned pale as she heard these words, for she realized, with a sinking heart, that in attempting to destroy the letter, and in being prevented, they had unwittingly made the case against Cora look much blacker. Naturally, when it got about, the world would say "her own sister doubted her and tried to cover up her guilt!"

Raines, seeing their unfortunate predicament, even as she did, sought to regain the ground they had lost by a frank explanation of their position.

"We are both at your service for any sort of examination," he answered. "It was not our intention to interfere with the course of justice, you see. On the contrary, we merely meant to expedite matters by eliminating false clues. And we hoped, too, to save Mrs. Kaine and the Stonington family a great deal of undesirable notoriety."

"Well, well," said the coroner grimly, "we will go into all that presently. I know nothing whatever about this case yet, except that Mr. Kaine met death by poison—cyanid of potassium, Dr. Graham said. I will make my own investigation, first, and Dr. Sneadon, here, will make his report. In the meantime, I think you had better sit over there by the windows, Miss Stonington. And will you take that big chair by the door, if you please?"

He motioned Raines to the opposite side of the room, calmly separating them so that it would be impossible for them to agree upon the answers they would make him later.

They yielded obediently, eager to obtain his good graces. Ann took her place by the dressing-table between the windows. Raines seated himself near the door. Between them, but several rods away, of course, Dr. Sneadon knelt beside the body of Jim Kaine, and Coroner Farrel hovering over him, looked on attentively.

The young man with the black satchel, who was acting as coroner's physician, agreed with Dr. Graham's verdict. Whereupon, the fact that James Kaine had died of poisoning, being officially established, the coroner began his investigation.

"Miss Stonington, if you please?" he said, by way of attracting Ann's attention, for she sat staring into space in a sort of lethargy.

"Yes," said Ann, turning to look up at him as he approached her.

"I should like to ask you a few questions, if you will be so good as to bear with me."

"Certainly," replied Ann, "I shall be glad to aid you in any way I can."

Farrel thanked her with a slight inclination of his head, then he resumed in a more businesslike voice than he had hitherto adopted:

"From what Mr. Raines has said, I understand that you were a sister-in-law to the deceased—is that right?"

"Quite right," answered Ann.

"Do you reside in this house?"

"No," said Ann, "with my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jessup P. Stonington."

"Mrs. Kaine is alive, is she not—the wife of the deceased, I mean, and your sister?"

"Yes," said Ann.

"She lives here with her husband?"

"She did live here with him until last night," said Ann slowly and distinctly.

"Until last night?" repeated the coroner, pricking up his ears. Across the room Raines listened, too.

"They had not been living happily together for a long time," explained Ann. "Mr. Kaine was in love with my sister, but he drank very heavily at frequent intervals, and when he drank, he abused her. She endured it for a long time, partly because she could not reconcile herself to the unpleasant publicity of divorce proceedings, partly because he assured her that if she ever tried to separate from him, he would destroy her reputation by means of false witnesses and false testimony.

"He was in politics, and she knew that such things had been done, and that if he chose he could do what he said. The world

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is only too eager to believe any scandal about a woman, especially a young and lovely woman in our class of society. But last night he struck her in public, and that humiliation was more than she could endure."

"So she left him? Last night?" asked the coroner interestedly.

"Yes."

"You say that he struck her in public. Where, may I ask, did this incident of the striking occur?"

"At Mrs. Sydney Clarke's, on Eighty-First Street."

"Mr. and Mrs. Kaine were visiting there?"

"Yes."

"Were there other guests?"

"Yes."

"Can you give me their names?"

"Yes; I was there, too. Mr. Richard Cochrane, Mr. Thomas Locke, Mr. Hampton MacKnight, Miss Vivien Marshall, Miss Roslyn French, Mrs. Frederick G. Spearman, Frederick G. Spearman, and Worthington Morris."

"You are sure you have named them all?"

"Yes, quite sure."

He had written down the names as he heard them.

"What was the immediate cause for Mr. Kaine's attack upon his wife?" he asked then.

"She had been playing bridge for stakes, as, indeed, all of us had been. He had a mania for keeping her short of funds. When he saw that she had won, he became incensed and struck her."

"Did Mrs. Kaine resent this?"

"Not then. Not there. She was in another woman's house, you know. She took him away—drove home with him, and then left him."

"Did you accompany them when they left the Clarke house?"

"No."

"How do you know, then, that your sister left him as soon as they returned? Did she come back to her father's house?"

"No."

"Where did she go?"

"I don't know. I fancy she hid herself away somewhere. She was afraid of him, you know."

"How do you know that she left him last night, then?"

Ann told him in detail how she had come there that morning—how she had found things.

"The beds had not been disturbed," she ended, "that is one good reason for thinking that my sister left last night. Another good reason is, that she went in the clothes she had worn to Mrs. Clarke's—a white satin dinner-gown, cut low, a white and silver cloak lined and trimmed with white fur, thin white silk stockings and satin slippers. She could have gone in those things last night, but not this morning."

"At what time did your sister and her husband leave the Clarke house?"

"Before midnight."

"And you have not heard of her since?"

"No."

"Did I understand you to say that your sister hated her husband?"

"She was afraid of him," answered Ann hesitatingly.

"But surely she had some feeling of resentment against him when he was drunk and abused her?"

"I suppose so," admitted Ann.

And then she added hastily:

"She isn't the sort of woman to harm any one, though. You must not think that. Just to get away and to be left in peace was all she wanted."

"But didn't she know that she never would be left in peace so long as he lived?" asked the coroner.

"She meant to hide so that he couldn't find her to annoy her," answered Ann. "That's why she has disappeared. That is why she has gone without letting even us know of her destination."

"But if she did not kill him," asked the coroner suddenly, "who could have done it? Who else had reason to wish him out of the way?"

"That is what we must find out," said the girl. "It was to that end I summoned Mr. Raines."

The coroner turned, now, and looked across at the detective

"I see," he said. Then meditatively

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studying first one and then the other, he added: "Now, Mr. Raines, and Miss Stonington, at the inquest, later, you will be put under oath and asked to tell everything you know concerning this affair. If you have discovered other evidence besides this letter, and have failed to lay it before me, you will not, I hope, perjure yourselves before God. He knows who killed this man on the floor, and He will see that the crime is punished and the guilty man or woman betrayed. I urge you both most strongly to tell me now anything that you may have omitted concerning this matter."

Ann answered quietly: "I think I have told you all that I know. I have no idea who killed him. I have no reason to suspect any one."

And Raines added: "We meant to destroy that letter because we were afraid that people who did not know Cora Kaine would draw a wrong conclusion from it. But we have made no other attempt to hide anything from any one. Miss Stonington has told you everything."

"I am glad to hear that," said the coroner. And then he raised his head alertly, in a listening attitude, as the sound of tramping feet became audible in the hall outside.

"The police, no doubt," he said.

Ann turned to Raines, her face becoming even paler than before, her dark eyes wide and appealing.

The noise of the officers' approach rang like thunder through the silent house, for the stairs were polished and uncarpeted. She saw, in her mind's eye, a great army of stalwart, blue-coated men, and realized that in another few minutes all of them—thousands and thousands scattered over the whole United States, would be hot upon Cora's trail.

She thought of Cora—poor, timid, frightened Cora, in her white satin and furs—fleeing furtively before them like a rabbit from a pack of pursuing hounds. And she closed her eyes, feeling that she must smother and suffocate and die under the oppressive weight of the calamity that had befallen them all.

Then the door opened and Inspector MacGaffney stood upon the threshold, backed by two policemen from the ranks, and a keen-eyed young man in tweeds, a newspaper reporter.

"O-ho!" cried MacGaffney, saluting the coroner, and then turning to grin jovially at Raines. "So we are to have the assistance of the world's greatest amateur detective in this, are we? And he's beaten us to it, begad!"

Raines smiled faintly and advanced to shake hands.

"I am here at the request of the Stonington family," he said. "You don't mind—"

"Not at all," answered MacGaffney heartily. "Glad to have the opportunity to give you a few practical pointers, me boy!"

The reporter, after taking off his hat to Ann, and addressing her by name, had joined the two policemen at the side of the body. But a glance sufficed him. He began to make a leisurely tour of the room, his sharp eyes darting in all directions.

Ann watched him, fascinated, feeling behind him the far-reaching power of the press. She imagined the descriptions of this scene that would appear in the evening papers. She fancied she could hear the name of Stonington in every mouth.

It was a good old name, never before dishonored or sullied by suspicion or gossip or scandal. She fancied she could see the world licking its lips over this newest mystery in "high life."

In another moment, now, she told herself, the fact that Cora had vanished would be known to both the inspector and the reporter, and they would suspect her; would begin to track her down.

If Ann only knew that her sister was innocent—if she only knew it beyond the possibility of doubt, the situation would not have been so awful. But she did not know. She only felt that Cora couldn't have done this thing. She only hoped that Cora hadn't done it.

These thoughts had flashed through her head while the inspector and Raines were greeting one another and shaking hands.

Now they approached the body on the floor, and the inspector turned to Raines, after one swift glance, and asked with good-natured raillery:

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"Well, now. You've had the advantage of a good look about. What do you make of this, me friend, murder or suicide?"

The words fell upon Ann's straining ears like a sign from Heaven.

Suicide! Why hadn't she thought of that before! How had they come to miss this very obvious way out of the muddle. Before Raines could answer, she spoke up. With cheeks flushed from excitement, and shining eyes, she answered for him:

"Suicide, of course. It could be nothing else. Mr. Kaine struck my sister last night, in public, when he was too drunk to realize what he did, and she left him. Then, in a fit of grief and remorse, he did this, here, you see, in the very room that had been hers."

CHAPTER VII.

THEORIES.

THAT she had been inspired; that her suggestion had been a master-stroke, Ann saw in Raines's eyes as he turned and faced her. And she glowed under his glance and remained quite undisturbed by the critical eyes of Inspector MacGaffney and the coroner and the doctor and the policemen and the reporter. All of them were regarding her curiously.

And then the cross-questioning began all over again, for the benefit of Inspector MacGaffney and the reporter. Both of these gentlemen took down on paper every word Ann said, and fired questions at her when she intentionally or unintentionally passed over some point that they thought important.

It was by far the biggest story that Rynearson, the reporter, had ever stumbled upon. It was so dramatic and sensational.

The proud, society beauty, Cora Stonington Kaine, being struck across the face before a roomful of the town's most exclusive citizens. He could revel in adjectives concerning her magnificent satins and furs and diamonds, and he could run some stunning photographs of her that his paper had on file. (They always keep pictures of society beauties ready for use.)

And he could describe that figure in evening clothes lying outstretched upon the soft, rose-colored rug in Mrs. Kaine's boudoir. And the safe full of empty jewel-cases. And the trembling woman fleeing—Heaven knows where — clad only in the scanty, shimmering raiment that she had on at the moment.

Yes, decidedly, it was the biggest story since the outbreak of the war. And it would be a "beat" into the bargain.

The inspector and the coroner, caring less for the dramatic possibilities of the affair than for the problem it presented, kept demanding more and more details, jumping from this phase of the case to that phase, purposely misunderstanding Ann and misconstruing what she said, and trying their best to muddle her or to inveigle her into contradicting herself. But she adhered strictly to the truth, and therefore did not fall into any of their traps.

She told frankly the few facts against Cora, realizing wisely that they were certain to be brought out, anyway.

She admitted that Cora had begun to detest her husband — indeed, that was a matter of common gossip, and any one in society could have told it to them—but she insisted that Cora had nothing to gain by killing him. When they pointed out that Cora had no money of her own, and that Kaine's death would make her independent, Ann replied that Cochrane was wealthy, and that if Cora had gone away with him, he would have taken care of her. Moreover, she reminded them that Cora had thousands of dollars' worth of jewelry with her.

Then they suggested that Cora might have killed her husband because she was afraid he would track her down and kill her; whereupon Ann replied that Cora need not have hidden herself away if she had known her husband was dead.

"Perhaps she hid herself away—not because she feared her husband, but because she feared the authorities would call her to account for killing him," suggested Inspector MacGaffney.

"If she had stayed here, and had declared that he killed himself, no one could have proven otherwise," answered Ann. "Every one would have believed her. No

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one would have suspected her. And don't you think if she had been capable of committing this crime, she would have been shrewd enough to foresee that? Besides, one might stab or shoot in a fit of rage or passion, but poisoning requires premeditation and preparation. And any one will tell you that my sister hadn't the courage of a rabbit!"

"That is true," added Raines. "I have known her for years. She went into hysterics at the thought of a mouse, or the sight of blood."

"Still," said MacGaffney, "women of just that type have been known to develop amazing courage, and even cruelty, in the proper circumstances."

"Aside from all this," went on Ann, "how could she have got the poison? You need a prescription for it, don't you?"

"Yes," answered the coroner's physician.

"Is Cochrane a doctor?" asked MacGaffney.

"No."

"Well, as far as that goes," said MacGaffney, "it won't be hard to find where the stuff came from and what sort of person bought it."

"There's another thing," interposed Raines. "I believe cyanid of potassium has an unpleasant taste, hasn't it?"

"Cats like it," said the coroner's physician. "But I think it is more or less disagreeable to persons."

"Still, it is easily distinguishable, isn't it? One wouldn't be apt to swallow it in champagne without detecting its presence?"

"No," admitted the doctor.

"Then if Mrs. Kaine had given it to her husband, he would not have taken it—once he got the taste of it, would he? He probably wouldn't have swallowed the first mouthful. But there's the glass and the bottle, both practically empty. That proves, to my way of thinking, that he drank it himself, in spite of the taste."

"He might have been too drunk to notice it," said MacGaffney.

"Hardly," objected Raines.

"Well," said the coroner, breaking in a little impatiently now, "I think we have learned about everything from Miss Stonington that she can tell us. Suppose we interview the servants?"

"Right!" agreed MacGaffney. "Clancey, go and marshal them together, and shoot them in here, one at a time."

During the cross-questioning of the servants, Ann and Raines sat thoughtfully silent. They listened intently, but no new facts were brought out; that is, nothing of much importance was discovered.

Quinn, the butler, admitted that it was he who had brought the champagne to Kaine's room. He said that it was his master's custom to take a pint every night before retiring, and that it was his business to bring the wine from the wine cellar and see that it was ready, all properly chilled. He added that he had obtained that particular bottle from a case delivered as usual by the wine importer, and that half of the case was gone.

"The master always opened it himself," explained Quinn. "He kept a corkscrew on his writing-table just for that purpose. All I had to do was to chill the wine and leave it, with a glass, in his room."

This plainly relieved Quinn of suspicion. When he had asserted strongly that he found the night-lock that morning exactly as he had left it the night before, he was excused.

Agnes gave practically the same testimony as she had given to Ann and Raines. The other servants seemed to know nothing, except that their master and mistress had quarreled frequently, and that Kaine did have fits of melancholy, as well as fits of mocking gaiety.

The second-man testified that Kaine often sat through a whole meal without addressing a word to his wife, while at other times he was talking and laughing and waiting upon her every moment.

When all the evidence was in, MacGaffney and the coroner looked at each other and then at Raines—dubiously.

"Well, it's got me guessing, I'm frank to confess," admitted the inspector, when the last of the servants had gone. "One minute I think the wife did it; the next minute I think he did it himself. How is it with you?"

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"I agree with you entirely," answered the coroner, nodding. "I feel that we haven't evidence enough yet to base a decision upon."

"Right!" agreed MacGaffney. "Whatever happened here last night, there's one person knows—and only one!"

"The woman!" said the coroner.

"Exactly. *Cherchez la femme,* as they have it in French," went on the inspector, proud of his learning. "We've got to find the woman."

"The quickest way to do that," said Rynearson, the reporter, "is to get on the trail of young Cochrane, isn't it?"

"You took the very words out of my mouth," cried MacGaffney.

"How about searching here?" suggested Raines.

"We can do that afterward. Clancey, you remain on guard, and see that nothing is disturbed. I'll be back in an hour at the latest."

"Yes, sir," said Clancey, saluting.

Raines drew near Ann.

"You'd better go home and get some rest," he said kindly. "You've been through a regular siege this morning—and then there's been the shock, you know. Besides, the news ought to be broken to your people."

"I'll get home before the papers come out," she said, "but I can't go yet. I must go with you as far as Dick's, anyway. He *may* not have gone away with her, you know. He *may* be there. And if he is, I want to hear what he has to say."

"He won't be there," asserted Raines.

"I'd like to go—and make sure, anyway," said Ann wistfully. "I couldn't bear sitting home and waiting for news. I never could bear waiting for things to happen."

"Very well," said Raines, yielding. "As far as I am concerned, you are quite welcome to go, I am sure."

He turned to MacGaffney and announced that Miss Stonington desired to go with them to Cochrane's apartment to see what they would learn there. The inspector looked surprised, but he replied that he had no objection whatever; so when MacGaffney and one of his men set off, a few minutes later, in the police department car that was waiting below, Raines and Ann followed immediately behind them in a taxi.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAIL.

RICHARD COCHRANE had an apartment on Park Avenue near Fifty-Ninth Street, and before its ornate iron-grilled doorways the two motors stopped.

MacGaffney's uniform awed the hall-boys into letting them all ascend without first announcing them by telephone. The rules of the house forbade this, but an inspector of police was above such rules, and he had his way with small objection from the uniformed attendants in charge.

All four of them in a party—Ann, Raines, the inspector, and Policeman Rogers—were carried up nine flights in the Circassian-walnut-and-gold lift and deposited in a small, white marble hallway, lighted by hanging alabaster domes.

Before them, as they left the elevator, were two doors covered with heavy brown fireproofing and thick, bevel-edged mirrors. These were, respectively, apartment 9 A and apartment 9 B.

Apartment 9 A, they had been told down-stairs, belonged to Mr. Richard Cochrane. Accordingly it was there that they rang the distinctly ornamental bell.

They could not hear it ring when they pushed the button, for the apartments in this very modern building were soundproof. They could not hear the soft tread of feet over carpeted floors within, either.

They did not know whether or not the summons had been heard until the door suddenly opened and the anxious, inquiring, rather lined face of an aged servant appeared in the aperture.

He was English. That was apparent at a glance. He wore side-burns and a livery of dark blue, and he had the deferential air of an English servant. Moreover, he had the respect and awe of the police that no free and independent American citizen feels.

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As he stood there, blinking, and gazing in startled wonder, almost in dismay, at the uniformed officials before him, Inspector MacGaffney spoke.

"Is this Richard Cochrane's apartment?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered the servant, plainly very nervous.

"Is Mr. Cochrane in?"

"No, sir."

"I hardly expected he would be," said MacGaffney. "Stand away from that door, at any rate, my man, and let us come in. I want a word or two with you."

The servant hesitated, but MacGaffney's hand upon the door helped him to decide. He backed off, holding the door wide, and into an interior of pleasant and cheerful dimness, into a luxuriantly furnished foyer, on through to a more luxuriantly furnished drawing-room, passed Ann, MacGaffney, Raines, and Rogers.

They advanced, looking about them eagerly. But if they expected to hear scurrying footsteps disappearing into the distance, if they expected to surprise persons who did not desire to be seen, they were mistaken.

No one was in the hall. No one was in the drawing-room. No one fled away before them into the farthermost recesses of the house.

Cochrane's servant followed them dubiously to the drawing-room door, and there stood looking on anxiously as they possessed themselves of the room.

The others stood about, waiting for MacGaffney to take the initiative. He proceeded to the door of the bedroom, which was adjoining. He stood there an instant, looking in between the curtains.

Then he turned and came back to the center table. Some letters and morning papers were lying there.

"So your master skipped out last night, eh?" he said sharply, fixing his keen eyes upon the servant.

"Yes, sir; he went last night, sir," admitted the servant.

"And he hasn't been in since, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Hasn't telephoned or sent any message?"

"No, sir."

"At what time last night did he go?"

"At—a little past twelve, sir."

"Did he take a bag?"

"No, sir."

"No bag? Be careful that you tell me the truth, my man. This is a bad business your master is mixed up in, and if you want to keep your own coat-tails clear, you'd better give me the facts I want *straight!*"

"I am telling you the truth, sir. He took no bag. He went just as he was—just as he came in a few minutes before, sir."

"What is your name, my man?" asked Inspector MacGaffney.

"Thomas, sir."

"Now, Thomas, answer me this. If your master didn't come back here for his bag, what *did* he come for?"

"I don't know for sure, sir. I don't know anything about his affairs, sir. I don't know what he's done, or what you are here for. But I got the impression he came for the message."

"A message?"

"Yes, sir. I hope I shall not injure Mr. Cochrane in saying this. He's been a good master to me for two years."

"You'll do him no injury," answered MacGaffney. "Any injury that's been done, he's done himself. And as far as telling the truth is concerned, if you don't do it willingly and freely, I'll have to *make* you tell it."

Before the menace in MacGaffney's voice Thomas quailed.

"I am willing to tell you the truth, sir," he said.

"I hope so. What was this message, then, for which he came back?"

"I don't know that, sir," answered the servant. "It came over the telephone."

"When?" asked MacGaffney.

"The first time, a few minutes before Mr. Cochrane came in. It was a lady asked for him."

"Did you know her voice?"

"No, sir."

"What did she say?"

"She just asked if he was here; and when I said he wasn't, she asked if I ex-

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pected him soon. I said I couldn't say when he would be in, as he hadn't left any word. She wouldn't give me her name or the message. She said she would call up again. Then she rang off."

"Well?" cried MacGaffney, promptingly. Ann and Raines were listening with strained attention.

"Shortly after that Mr. Cochrane came in. He looked very pale and disturbed, I thought," went on Thomas slowly. "I told him about the message, and he seemed excited. He kept his coat and hat on, and just walked up and down the room here, waiting and watching the telephone there."

"Go on, for Heaven's sake, man! Don't keep stopping!" cried MacGaffney testily. "What next?"

"That's all I know, sir. I left the room and went into the back of the house. I heard the phone ring again, though my door was closed; but I did not go to answer it, because I knew Mr. Cochrane was there, and I didn't hear what he said.

"The first thing I heard after that was the front door slamming. I came out and looked around here then. And I saw that he had gone off again just as he was. He hadn't told me whether he'd want me again or not, so I waited up for two hours. But he did not come in or telephone, and, thinking he meant to stay out all night, I went to bed myself at two o'clock.

"I thought it all very strange, though, sir—especially when he did not come in himself or send for some clothes. He was in his evening things, you see, sir. If you please, what is it Mr. Cochrane has done?"

MacGaffney shrugged.

"Nothing himself. We want to get in touch with him, though, because we want to reach, through him, another party."

"The lady! Is that it, sir?" guessed Thomas with unlooked for perspicacity.

"Exactly," answered MacGaffney dryly. "The lady. Now you are quite sure, Thomas, that you have no idea where your master might have gone. Supposing he wanted to clear out of the way for a while—to hide himself and some one else? You can't guess where he'd be likely to go?"

"No, sir," responded Thomas, shaking his head. "I really can't, sir. I'm sorry."

"All right," answered MacGaffney, after a long look into the servant's wrinkled face. "If you hear from him or of him, I'd advise you to get in touch with me at once. I'm Inspector MacGaffney, of police headquarters."

"Inspector MacGaffney, very good, sir," repeated Thomas.

"I guess that just about completes our business here," said MacGaffney then.

"How about asking the telephone company to trace that call?" suggested Raines. "The call he got last night?"

MacGaffney smiled.

"No good. We'd get a pay-station somewhere. Or else the Kaine house."

"But if we get a pay-station, we may pick up the trail from there," Raines pointed out. "They must have met somewhere—and it may have been where she phoned from—and some one may have seen."

"You've got a lot of 'mays' in there," grinned MacGaffney, but he turned back to the telephone without further protest and was presently calling:

"Hello! Give me your manager!"

The others waited, Ann casting a glance of admiration and approval upon Raines.

"Hello!" called MacGaffney then. "This is Inspector MacGaffney, of Police Headquarters. I want you to trace a call that came in to this telephone last night about twelve o'clock. 678910 is the number. Plaza, 678910—"

"I don't think I can help you," replied the manager. "We can seldom trace calls from the receiving-station."

"Well, you'll have to help me," said MacGaffney. "It's important. Let me know what you find out."

"Very well, I'll try," agreed the manager.

MacGaffney then hung up and the party left the apartment of Mr. Cochrane, but once they were outside in the street where no one could overhear, MacGaffney said:

"So far, we've found out nothing. But I haven't dropped this thread yet. I'll have one of my own men in there as hall-boy in half an hour, to see all the mail and all the visitors that come and go, and I'll have another to shadow Thomas, just to make sure he is straight and aboveboard

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with us. And the minute he goes out, I'll have one of my men go through that apartment."

Raines nodded.

"The very course I should pursue myself," he said. "Where are you going, now?"

"Back to headquarters," answered MacGaffney, "and then to the Kaine house again."

"I'll meet you there," said Raines, and then he gave the Stonington address to the chauffeur and reentered the cab with Ann.

"Well?" she asked curiously, as they faced each other from opposite corners.

"Well," said Raines slowly. "It seems quite plain that Cora has gone with him, as I suspected."

Ann laid her hand on his arm.

"Do you still care?" she asked softly, looking up at him.

For an instant he hesitated. Then he answered frankly:

"No, I think not—not in the way you mean. That ended long ago. It wasn't as bad as I thought it was, of course. The feeling I had for her wasn't what I thought it was at all. I expect I was simply fascinated.

"She was so very dazzling—as a girl," he went on. "And every one turned to look after her. It made a man feel as if he would be winning a prize if he won her. Oh, I can't analyze it exactly. It's useless to try. But I never was in love with Cora. I just fancied that I was. And I've only the sympathy for her, now, that an old friend would have. If she has gone with Cochrane, I hope he makes her happy. And I hope she went before the thing that happened to Jim Kaine had happened to him!"

"I know she went before that. I am sure of it!" answered Ann.

"That suicide theory of yours was an inspiration," he observed then, turning from the window to look at her.

"I think," said Ann slowly, "that it was more than that. I think it was the truth I was seeing for one little instant. I think—for just a second—I penetrated the thin veil that hangs between past and present, and that I saw what had occurred there in Cora's room! She went away with Dick Cochrane and Jim killed himself. I know it. You'll see—they'll come back—when the papers carry the news to them!"

"I hope so," said he. "Murder is such a hideous thing!"

"Hideous," agreed Ann. "Hideous! That is how I know Cora could not have descended to it. She always shunned things that were not pleasant!"

And as she thought of how very unpleasant this thing was she shuddered involuntarily.

"What is it?" asked Raines solicitously.

"Reaction, I suppose," admitted Ann, through pale lips. She began suddenly to feel rather faint. "I was thinking of how he lay there and how I walked about and looked down at him without minding—without feeling anything! I didn't realize, I dare say."

She closed her eyes. Raines threw out his arm swiftly and braced her.

"Come, come!" he whispered, "you've been so splendidly brave and fine! You mustn't give way now!"

At the contact of his arm, rather than at the sound of the words, Ann struggled against the insidious weakness that seemed about to engulf her. She felt as though she must burst into tears and sob against his shoulder.

She was shivering with cold that was not cold at all, but nervousness. She was longing to let herself float out into the peaceful oblivion of a fainting spell. But she bit her lips and clenched her hands and fought hard.

"There!" he said, relieved, seeing her dark eyes open. "You are better now, aren't you?"

"Yes," said she, trying to make herself believe it.

"You've had a pretty stiff siege of it all morning. You must go straight to your own room and rest. Promise me that you will, won't you?"

"I can't. I must break it to the others."

His arm still lay behind her—bracing her. He ignored its position, and she hesitated to speak of it. But there was really nothing to object to. He was holding her most impersonally.

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"I'll do that if you'll let me," he volunteered.

"I should be very grateful if you would," she answered in a very low voice. "And if you would phone me in a couple of hours and let me know anything that has developed."

"I will," he assured her. "I will do more than that. I will come in at tea-time and we will hold another consultation!"

"Thank you," said Ann, with a long sigh of relief. "You are very good!"

And then the cab stopped at the door, and they descended. The butler had the house door open for them before they had reached it, and of him Ann asked:

"Is my father still here, Giddings, or has he gone?"

"He is still in the study, miss," said Giddings.

"Tell him," said she, "that Mr. Arthur Raines desires to see him at once—alone—most importantly!"

"Yes, miss," said Giddings, turning to depart. She gave Raines her hand.

"Don't forget you've promised me that you will rest," he said, looking up into her eyes.

"I sha'n't forget. Until tea-time," she answered.

"Until tea-time."

She went slowly up the stairway, leaning heavily upon the balustrade. She went more slowly along the corridor above, guiding herself with a hand on the wall.

She got the door of her bedroom open and closed it behind her. Then she collapsed in a heap on the floor and lay still.

The maid that her father sent found her there still unconscious. That was Ann's way—to bear up as long as she was really needed—and then to collapse.

CHAPTER IX.

KEEPING TAB.

ANN came to, at last, to hear her mother going into hysterics in a near-by room, but hysterics was a well-known and rather frequently-used accomplishment with her mother, and so Ann was not greatly alarmed.

She did desire to go and offer herself as nurse, but the maid discouraged her in this and promised to go instead if Ann would try to sleep. Ann agreed and, to her own amazement, kept her word.

It was nearly noon then. She slept for three hours, waking up at a quarter to three, feeling much stronger and rather hungry. Without getting out of bed she rang, and the maid came to her almost at once.

"Is my father still at home," asked Ann; "or did he go down-town?"

"He is with your mother, Miss Ann," answered the maid.

"Go and ask, please, if there is any news."

She waited impatiently until the maid came back and told her that there was none. Then she rose and began to dress.

When she was ready she went into her mother's room and joined her parents. Both of them seemed dazed, and broken by the double blow that had fallen upon them.

Jim's violent death was no more terrible to them than Cora's disappearance under such circumstances. That a Stonington would elope with any man who was not her husband—that was the incredible thing! Any one might die of poisoning.

But that a Stonington had broken the commandments! And that by nightfall all the world would know of it. That was, indeed, disgrace!

Mrs. Stonington began to weep afresh at the sight of Ann and the thought of what all this would mean to Ann's chances for marrying well. Stonington, depressed by unimaginable fears for Cora, his first-born and his favorite, paced the floor like a caged lion. And save for a soothing word or two to his wife, he said nothing.

Cora's mother blamed her for going away. She declared that no one would have had a word to say against the Stoningtons if Cora had been where she should have been when Jim was found. No matter how Jim had died, if Cora had been there the world would have thought nothing of it.

But now! What would they not say! If they escaped the ignominy of having Cora suspected of murder and actually tried, there would still be the disgrace of her elopement!

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"She married him with her eyes open!" cried the old lady. "If she repented her bargain, she should have kept quiet, or at the most, she should have sued for divorce. Even that would be better than this!"

Ann tried to remind her of Cora's intolerable position, and their attitude when she had hinted several times about a divorce; but it was no use. They did not even listen to what she said.

Her father was too troubled, too worried. Her mother was too set in her own opinions. So presently she left them, hearing the first extra called in the streets.

Descending, she sent Giddings out to buy one. And as she sat in the drawing-room, studying it, Ted came in.

He had been in his own rooms up-stairs, from whence the shouts of the newsboys had lured him, too. Fully clothed now, though he was, carefully shaven and thoroughly groomed, he still looked white and rather drawn.

But Ann could not guess whether the news about Cora was responsible or whether he still suffered from the effects of his night's debauch.

"Well?" he asked uncertainly, as he came in and stood before her. "What do they say? Do they play it up?"

"Of course they do," she answered wearily, holding out the extra so that he could see.

There was a photograph of Cora in evening clothes—and a photograph of Jim—the photographs that they had had taken when they were first engaged, a year before. And the headlines ran:

JAMES KAINE FOUND DEAD! WIFE STRANGELY MISSING!

Well-known Millionaire Victim of Cyanid!—Had Quarreled with His Wife—She Cannot be Found—Police Undecided Between Verdicts of Suicide and Murder—Mysterious Note Important Evidence!

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Teddy, reaching for the sheet.

And he read it aloud—or rather that part of it that dealt with the Kaine case. The young reporter, Rynearson, had done his work thoroughly.

He had told everything that there was to tell about Cora's marital unhappiness, the scene at Virginia Clarke's, the scene next morning at the Kaine house, the letter from Cochrane and the various theories advanced. He gave Ann credit for the suicide theory and printed an interview with her.

He added, rather significantly, though, that "others" believed that Kaine was not the sort of man to kill himself in a fit of remorse—that he was not the kind to clear the way for a successor and that there was more to the whole affair than had yet come out.

He did not—in so many words—say that Cora might have poisoned her husband. But the reader could not help thinking that maybe she had.

"How awful! How awful!" moaned Ann, as he finished and raised blazing eyes to meet her weary and resigned ones.

"It damns her, simply damns her!" he cried. "Why, in the name of God, did she have to leave that note of Cochrane's behind her! Why did she have such a thing in her possession at all. Why hadn't she destroyed it when she received it?"

"If she only had!" cried Ann.

"She always was a fool!" he went on, raging about. "It was vanity and conceit made her keep it. She's a vain little fool—and this is the outcome of her vanity. If it weren't for that letter, there'd be some hope for her. But people think that a woman who'd run away from her husband with another man would do anything! Public opinion will be against her!"

"I know," sighed Ann.

"The fact that she isn't at home wouldn't be so bad if she had only gone to some friend—or if she'd come here—or even if she'd gone to a hotel! It would have made her look innocent, in fact, because it would add color to your suicide theory. But now—Good God! The only way we can save her is to find her on the q t and pretend she hasn't been with Cochrane. And how we are going to do that is more than I can guess."

"Arthur Raines is already trying to find her," said Ann. "I sent for him early this morning—from Cora's. He's been working on the case for hours already."

"What?" Ted gasped, standing still and

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staring at her. "Raines? The fellow who came back with you and told us the news?"

"Yes."

"Who is he? I thought he was with the police. He said he was a detective."

"He is—a private detective. But he's been a friend of Cora's and mine for years. Surely you've met him before? He used to come here when Cora was single."

"To see Cora?"

"To see us both."

"But if he hasn't come since, I guess it was principally to see Cora."

"Yes, I dare say," admitted Ann quietly. "At any rate, he has our interest at heart. And I impressed upon him the importance of finding Cora at once."

"If he's trustworthy, of course that's something," mused Teddy, "but we ought to get the best detectives we can afford in a case like this, I think. You don't know how serious Cora's position is!"

"Yes, I do. That's the reason I sent for Arthur Raines. He is an experienced detective. Even the police inspector who is working on the case listened to Arthur's suggestions with approval. And I know that any discoveries he chances to make can be kept quiet if we ask it. I know that because he was in the very act of destroying that note of Cochrane's when the coroner arrived and caught him at it!"

"Damn that note!" cried Teddy. "Cochrane ought to have known better than to write it in the first place!"

"All of us do things, sometimes, on impulse that we might not do on sober second thought," said Ann. "Or we do things without at all realizing the fearful consequences that may ensue."

Teddy halted suddenly and looked at her. "That is quite true," he admitted.

"It is a pity," she went on quietly, "that we can't know when we do a thing what it is going to lead to. If I had known last that you might have prevented all this by going to Cora's—late as it was—I should have urged you to go, instead of urging you not to!"

He frowned slightly.

"But I should not have gone in. I did go, you know. And there were no lights visible—so I did not stop!"

"That's so!" said Ann, looking up at him. "I remember now, you told me. You did go. But you didn't notice the light because the shades were drawn inside. The lights were on. They must have been, for they were still on in Cora's room when I got there this morning!"

"I thought they were out," he said. And then he added: "By the way, you haven't told any one yet that I set off for Cora's, have you?"

"No-o," answered Ann. "Why?"

"It would do no good. Nothing would be accomplished and I would be involved in a mess that's already bad enough! Better not tell even Raines. If he—or any of them—got the idea that I started for Cora's, you know—in an angry frame of mind against Jim—why—why they'd think I must know something about all this, and I don't, of course!"

Ann was listening to him, sitting motionless in her chair, a puzzled frown in her eyes. What he said was logical enough, but his attitude—his bearing—disturbed her.

"Of course I'll say nothing whatever about it," she answered instantly, "but you are sure you did see nothing, Ted. You caught sight of no one in the neighborhood of the house?"

"No one."

"You didn't notice a cab waiting—or anything?"

"Absolutely not!"

"I wonder if any one saw Cora leave the house?" she said then, meditatively.

"Hundreds of persons, no doubt. They'll begin to turn up as soon as this extra circulates. You'll find eye-witnesses of Cora's departure, who will place the circumstances anywhere from dinner-time until morning!"

"Well, we shall know whether or not they really saw her," said Ann, "for we know exactly what she wore!"

The bell rang at this moment, and Ann and Ted looked at each other.

"Reporters?" asked Ted, guessing.

"Or Arthur Raines," answered Ann. "I asked him to stop at tea-time and bring me the latest news."

"Oh," said Ted, non-committally, and there was time for no more as Giddings appeared with the detective's card.

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Ann ordered that the gentleman be admitted and that tea be served. A few seconds later she was shaking hands with him again, and flushing under his anxious glance as he sought to find whether or not she had rested.

"It's good of you to come," she said gratefully, meeting his eyes.

"It's good of you to let me come," he answered, then turned questioningly toward Ted.

Ann introduced them and they shook hands, surveying each other critically—instinctively on the defensive for no particular reason.

"Smoke?" asked Teddy, offering his cigarette-case.

"No, thanks," answered Raines, then turning back to Ann, he observed, "I'd no idea you had a brother!"

"I haven't trained much with your crowd," explained Teddy, lighting his cigarette and tossing the match into the grate. "The society thing is a little too slow for me."

"I see," said Raines.

And he did see that Ted was dressed more after the fashion of Broadway than of the avenue, and that he had the manner and speech of Broadway, too. Aside from the fact that he looked a lot like Cora, there was nothing to stamp him as a Stonington.

"But—sit down," urged Ann presently, when the pause seemed about to become too prolonged and too significant. "And tell me what you have learned since I left you."

Raines obeyed her; threw himself into the chair opposite hers, and answered at once:

"One very damaging bit of evidence against your sister, I am sorry to say. At least—well, you shall judge for yourself what construction you would put upon it if you were conducting the official investigation. Do you remember that Quinn, the butler, testified to bringing the champagne and a glass to his master's bedchamber? You remember his saying that he was in the habit of doing this every night?"

"Yes," answered Ann. From the hearth-rug, where he was standing, with one elbow upon the mantelpiece, Ted listened attentively, too.

"Well, I don't know whether you noticed or not, but just before you mentioned your sister's jewel-safe and we found the letter from Cochrane, I had been looking about, and I had found a champagne-glass smashed at the foot of the dressing-table, and a water-goblet standing next to the empty bottle."

"It seems to me I remember seeing them there," admitted Ann.

"Well, this is the fact that was brought out upon more careful examination. Inspector McGaffney discovered it, not I. The fumes of cyanid of potassium cannot be detected arising from either the champagne-bottle or the broken champagne-glass. But they can be noticed distinctly about the water-goblet!"

"You mean, then, that the poison was not in the bottle of champagne, nor in the champagne-glass that Quinn brought up?"

"So it would seem," answered Raines.

"It was administered, instead, in the water-goblet, which Jim used after he smashed the champagne-glass, is that it?"

"Yes."

"Where did the water-goblet come from?" asked Ted, slowly.

"It was one that your sister kept in her room," answered Raines hesitatingly.

Ann caught her breath. Ted stood motionless, staring.

"Inspector MacGaffney reasons the thing out this way: Kaine brought his bottle and glass into your sister's room. On some pretext or other, she managed to break the glass. Perhaps she took it into her own hands in order to drink, and dropped it to the floor, where it smashed. Perhaps she jogged his arm. Perhaps she swept it off the dressing-table. It all amounts to the same thing, at any rate. Your sister succeeded in destroying his glass, so that he would use hers, and—in hers—she had the deadly white powder waiting!"

"This is—outrageous!" gasped Ted, furiously. "Pure guesswork! He has absolutely no authority for the statement that my sister had placed the poison in the glass before offering it to her husband!"

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"No authority?" repeated Raines. "Of course. That is the way he works. He finds a theory that will fit the facts that he knows, and then tries to establish the other facts and prove his theory true! His next step will be to discover if your sister had the poison in her possession. He will try to find out where it was purchased, and by whom. A prescription is necessary, you know, in order to obtain the stuff. By means of the prescription he hopes to trace the purchase of the poison."

"And if he finds that my sister did obtain it?" asked Ted.

"He'll think he has a strong case against her, and he'll probably issue a warrant."

"Good Lord! Suppose she wanted to kill a cat, or something! Suppose she wanted the cyanid for some perfectly harmless reason?"

"I am hoping," said Raines gravely, "that she did not purchase it at all, and that they cannot prove she had it in her possession. Then their whole case against her falls. Otherwise, I am afraid for her—very much afraid!"

"You don't think a jury of sane, sensible men would convict a woman on such circumstantial evidence!" cried Ann.

"It is circumstantial evidence, of course. But—always providing they prove she had the poison—the solution seems so plain! Kaine was in the habit of abusing her. She hated him. They always quarreled. She had no money in her own right, and her father was not in a position to keep her as she had been living.

"She has a lover who is urging her to elope. She fears her husband, and knows he will not give her a divorce. He brings things to a climax by humiliating her publicly. She retaliates by taking his life, thereby punishing him, freeing herself, and securing his fortune—all at one blow.

"As for the facts of the case. He is found dead in her room. Her door is locked from the outside, and she is gone. She must have fled through his room. The inference is that she fled after his death, or would he not have pursued her? And, finally, this damning fact—of the poison being discernible only in *her* glass!"

"It does sound convincing," admitted Ann, "but I know there is a mistake somewhere. She didn't kill him. I feel it. I could swear to it! I'd stake my soul on it!"

"So would I," added Teddy. And then, almost appealingly, he asked of Raines: "What can we do?"

"Hope that they won't trace the purchase of the poison to her door, and—try to find her!" said Raines. "You have no word from her at all yet?"

"None!" answered Ann. "I don't know why. I should think she would have dropped us a line, in any case, just to relieve our anxiety. Even if she went before he—died—if she just eloped with Dick, and she thought we would all blame her, she might have known we would want to know that she is safe. She ought to have known I would worry about her."

"She isn't thinking about you or any of us," said Ted. "She always was thoughtless and selfish to the core."

"Ted!" said Ann reprovingly, glancing from him to Raines.

Knowing that Raines had once fancied himself in love with Cora, she was afraid this plain speaking might hurt him. But if it did, he gave no sign.

"Are you sure," he asked, as though he had not heard Ted at all, "that Mrs. Clarke and Miss Hastings told you the truth when they said they had not seen Cora?"

"They sounded truthful enough," answered Ann. "Why?"

"We found the daily written reports that the servants made to Kaine concerning Cora's movements, and from them we glean that those two ladies were your sister's only friends. Or, perhaps I should say that those two ladies would seem to be the only ones with whom your sister went about, for one of them was certainly not your sister's friend!"

"What do you mean?" asked Ann, curiously. "Of which are you speaking?"

"Of Mrs. Clarke."

"Virginia?"

"Yes. A complete set of reports from her formed part of Mr. Kaine's collection. It seems that she was a spy in his pay!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

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The Money Hater

by Joseph Ivers Lawrence

Author of "Playing the Man," "Hampton of the Heights," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

FORTUNES OF THE ROAD.

THE dusty, tired-looking foot traveler, whose well-made clothes and good boots puzzled the observer of his unshaven and rather haggard face, closed the hood of the big six-cylinder and snapped the bright brass fasteners into place.

"There," he said, to the man in the pongee duster who stood beside him, "I guess that will carry you to the next garage. I'm not an expert. I can only tinker a little with the things in an emergency. You'll find a repair shop in Spencer; I passed one there about an hour ago."

"Well, it's the last time I'll be caught so far from home without my chauffeur," grumbled the owner of the car, as he took the tools from the stranger and replaced them with his kit. "I can drive well enough when things go right, but a man's got to be a regular mechanic when the blamed old sewing-machine gets balled up like that.

"Much obliged, I'm sure," he added, a bit more graciously. "Lucky thing you happened along just as you did. I'd been here half an hour already, and used up all my cuss-words. Sorry I can't return the favor somehow."

The dustry traveler smiled wearily.

"I'm glad I was able to help you out," he said. "If you were going toward Worcester I would accept an invitation to a seat in your car, but as it is—why, it's quite all right, I assure you."

"Worcester!" exclaimed the man, with a suggestion of impatience. "Don't mean to say you're hoofing it to Worcester! Why don't you take a trolley-car? They run along here every few minutes."

The pedestrian shook his head, and an awkward shrug betrayed a slight embarrassment.

"I think my feet will take me there if I keep hard at it," he said quietly.

The man in the duster regarded him with stern challenge.

"You mean you haven't got the car-fare?" he muttered. "H-m! An' I suppose the time you took to fix my steam-roller has kept you from getting to the city before dark."

He threw back his duster and rummaged in his trousers pockets, producing presently a crumpled one-dollar bill.

"I'm learning what petty graft can amount to," he mumbled, half to himself. "If you break-down ten miles from a town, I swear there'll be a feller on hand to fix things and get a tip. But never mind! If you're so broke that you can't take a car, you're welcome to this."

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For an instant the other's eyes dwelt longingly on the money, then they flashed with sudden spirit and met those of the ill-natured motorist.

"I beg your pardon!" said the wayfarer sharply; "we have misunderstood each other." With that he turned abruptly and strode away with the vigor of injured dignity.

"Here, you," the motorist yelled after him, "don't be a damn fool!" But the other marched on, never turning his head, and he was left alone with his car, burning with the futile rage of one whose reluctant charity has been spurned.

A moment later, out of the infinite variety of wayfarers of twentieth century roads, appeared a third: a keen-eyed young man of sharp, aggressive features, clad in cap, sweater, and dust-stained trousers, and mounted on a bicycle.

An unlighted cigarette drooped pathetically from his half-open lips, and as he saw the man in the duster, seating himself at his steering-wheel and preparing to start the big car, he back-pedaled to an abrupt halt, rested one foot on the ground, and saluted the man with an airy wave of the hand.

"Got a match?" he inquired civilly, but without ceremony.

The man in the car gave him a sweeping glance of obvious disfavor.

"No!" he snapped.

"Same to you!" retorted the bicyclist. "I kinder thought you wouldn't have nothing like that. No one but a regular feller carries matches."

He pushed off with his foot and went spinning away, leaving the plethoric man of the duster with a fresh grievance against the fortunes of the road. A hundred yards beyond the wheelman overtook the weary pedestrian.

"Hey!" he called out genially. "Got a match?"

The man halted and groped anxiously in his pockets. Then his face brightened as he produced a packet of paper matches.

"That's one thing I have got!" he exclaimed, smiling pleasantly.

The other got off his wheel and went about the business of kindling the cigarette. Then, after a series of rapid and grateful puffs, he offered a packet of cigarettes to his benefactor with a gracious gesture.

"Have one," he said. "I knew, somehow, that you'd have a match, even if you haven't got an auto to travel in. You look like you'd carry regular things. I gave a feller back there a full-size grouch, just askin' him for a light—an' he was driving a bird of a car, too; no flivver!"

The foot traveler took a cigarette.

"Thank you," he said. "I don't often use them, but I'll have a puff or two with you."

The bicyclist gave him a light, then moved his wheel to the side of the road and reclined luxuriously upon its frame.

"Where you walking to? Goin' to Leicester?" he inquired, without apology, but with perfect friendliness.

"Worcester," answered the other simply.

"My God!" said the questioner, in a way that seemed to relieve the expression of profanity while freighting it with solicitude and astonishment. "Say! that must be ten miles for you. I'm going there, too, but I've got this old tin horse.

"Why don't you—er—take a car?" he added, in a more reserved tone as though feeling that he was verging upon more delicate ground.

"If I walk," answered the other, affecting a more cheerful humor than his general appearance warranted, "I shall have the benefit of the exercise—there's nothing like walking to keep a man in trim!—and I shall certainly get there. Cars break down, you know—not half as reliable as shoe-leather!"

"Denzil is my name—Francis Denzil," the bicyclist announced suddenly, as though deciding to establish a foundation of confidence.

The other bowed.

"My name is Arthur Grove," he responded.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Grove," murmured the other formally, and gave him his hand.

"You live in Worcester?" he inquired in the next breath.

Grove shook his head.

"I am going there to look around a lit-

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tle," he answered. "If there is work for me to do there, I may stay for a while."

"I see!" exclaimed Denzil, visibly gratified at the opening of a line of intelligent communication. "Well, we can shake on that: I'm going there after a job, too. I've lived there some before, but I blow around a good deal and I've been in Lynn about three months. Worcester don't make much noise outside, but there's a good deal going on there all the time. What's your line?"

Grove shrugged his shoulders and looked regretfully doubtful.

"I can drive a motor, or do most of the work in a garage, I guess," he said, "but I haven't much experience in any other sort of work."

"Nothing wrong about that!" declared Denzil; "plenty of jobs for chauffeurs. I suppose—it's none o' my business, at that!—but I suppose you're saving all your loose change to live on till you get a job. Well, that's all right, but if I was you I'd take a car. You look all in now, and you'll be laid up by the time you get to Worcester."

"I think that I'll make it all right," answered Grove, cheerfully, "and, you see, I'll have more money for food than if I gave up and paid for a ride. I'm not altogether strapped, but I can't afford extravagance like trolley cars."

"Look a here!"exclaimed Denzil impulsively, "I've taken kind of a shine to you; I've got a hunch you're an all-right feller. I don't want to butt in like a fresh guy—that kind makes me sick!—but you be a good sport an' let me stake you. I'll slip you something for car-fare, now, an' you come to the boarding-house where I always go. It ain't the Bancroft Hotel, but it's an all-right place on Chatham Street, right handy to everything, and Mrs. Bixby gives you plenty of feed without taking all your salary for it. I'll stake you, an' you pay me when you get a job. How does that listen?"

"It 'listens' as though one man in the world had a real human heart," said Grove earnestly, "and I'm just as grateful and pleased about it as though I could accept such kindness."

Denzil sniffed with frank disgust.

"Oh, can the sob stuff!" he cried. "You ain't on the screen. You've got to eat, and you can't go round an' poke people in the eye an' take their grub away from 'em like Charlie Chaplin. If you could see a close-up flash of yourself right now, you'd want to feed and hit the hay right away; you look bad, though it's none o' my business."

He took a half-dollar and a quarter from his pocket, after some fumbling, and offered the coins to Grove.

"Don't be a poor nut!" he pleaded earnestly. "Take this and get on the next car for Worcester. I'll be waiting for you at Mrs. Bixby's, and I'll fix it with her so's you'll have a room and three whole feeds per day. How about it?"

"You're such a mighty good fellow, that I don't know how I could refuse!" declared Grove, with deep feeling. "I should feel meaner for declining than for accepting such whole-hearted help and friendship. I'll do it!"

CHAPTER II.

HELPING HANDS.

IT was early evening when Arthur Grove got off the suburban trolley-car at the City Hall in Worcester. He conferred with the policeman on the crosswalk, showing him the slip of paper on which the generous Mr. Denzil had scrawled the address of the Chatham Street boarding-house, and the officer took elaborate pains to lay out a route for him, up Pleasant Street to Oxford, thence to the required thoroughfare and westward some few paces to his destination.

Grove did not set out at once, however. He sauntered first down Front Street to a barber-shop, to expend what remained of the friendly loan upon the improvement of his appearance.

His luggage reduced to pocket proportions, included a razor, but he was loath to present himself before the esteemed landlady of his host with the curly brown fringe that spoke so eloquently of straitened circumstances and enforced neglect.

It was therefore well after dinner-time when he turned into Chatham Street and stopped in front of a house where Mr.

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Francis Denzil kept anxious vigil, seated on the steps under an arching bower of honeysuckle and trumpet vine.

"Thought you weren't coming!" he exclaimed getting up with a sigh of relief. "I see you had to stop at the tonsorial parlor and get all dolled up to meet the ladies."

Grove winced, with a vision of traditional boarding-house keepers rising to fill him with a new dread.

"I've been thinking that I had a good deal of nerve to accept your generous offer so readily," he remarked, as he took the other's hand. "As we never met before, and you know nothing whatever of me, except that I had a light for you when it was most needed, it seems that you are sacrificing caution and discretion rather recklessly to 'Faith, Hope, and Charity.'"

"Say! you talk a good deal like a parson, or a real estate salesman," observed Denzil humorously. "Let's not have any more argument about it. If I'm willing to take a chance on staking you, let it go at that. I go pretty strong on first impressions, and I don't have to know a man twenty years to make a friend of him. I'm from the West, and—"

"That explains a great deal, of course," interrupted Grove. "I knew that you would talk down any objection I might offer, Mr. Denzil, and I can't deny that it's mighty comfortable to have such hospitality drop from a clear sky. I think, though, that we should have some understanding, for your protection. Let me say that I'll stay here for a week, and if I haven't secured a position that will enable me to repay your loans by that time, I will remove myself without further argument, and shift for myself until the luck turns."

"That's fair," said Denzil perfunctorily. "A feller like you won't have to go a whole week without a job. I'm not worrying."

The new guest was ushered into the house and formally presented to the landlady. The conspicuous absence of the traditional trunk, and, indeed, of any visible impedimenta, had been glossed over by the diplomatic Denzil, and so far from being inquisitive or suspicious, the woman was warmly solicitous of the comfort of the new arrival.

Grove asked no more questions, but he feared within himself, that Denzil had perjured his soul to stand sponsor for him.

He was established in a neat room of modest proportions at the rear of the third floor, and as soon as the formalities were over, Denzil hastened to entertain him in his own more commodious apartment.

"For a man out of a job, as I think you said you were," observed Grove, "you seem to be very much at ease."

"I never worry, so long as I have a month's expenses in my pocket," replied Denzil. "Something always turns up. I suppose I ought to stick to jobs longer than I do, but I'm waiting till I find one that suits me. I get a little bit o' cash ahead, and then I pull out and take a look around. You see, I've got to find something that'll do something more for me than pay me a salary. It may sound pretty cocky, Friend Grove, but I ain't going to be satisfied till I'm rich."

"They say that satisfaction doesn't come that way," rejoined Grove.

"I'll take a chance," declared Denzil. "You hear a good deal about the rich fellers being the unhappiest and most discontented of all, but it's always some poor man, or some grouch that couldn't be happy anyway, that says it. I've looked things over pretty well, and, take it from me, Grove, you can't be very happy without money—and the more the better!

"Take a look at yourself," he went on earnestly. "No offense intended, you know; but you're a nice, quiet sort of a feller, with no kick coming, no matter how bad off you are, yet you can't say you were contented or happy hoofing it along in the dust. Which would you rather be—tell me right off the bat!—a feller with a bum job, and no money in the bank, or a swell guy with two million-dollar bungalows, a steam yacht, sixteen limousines and a racing stable?"

"You don't stop at extremes, do you?" laughed Grove. "It's either nothing at all, or a fortune like Andy Carnegie's, for you! No half measures, eh?"

"The gink that starts out for a half

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portion gets a cold bite every time!" asserted Denzil. "You watch me! I'm going to play the game—win or lose—and if I win out, you'll see one poor little rich man that ain't pining away and hating himself."

Grove shook his head, with a doubtful smile.

"I guess I'm skeptical," he said slowly. "Maybe I've read too much dyspeptic philosophy. Of course, you couldn't understand a man's contentment with a hut in the woods and a diet of bread and beans. I was thinking of Thoreau."

"A nut!" declared Denzil conclusively.

"Well, I'd like to see you the object of an experiment in the matter," said Grove. "I wonder what you really would do! If you should strike it rich, as some fellows do, now and then, I wonder—"

"Take it from me," broke in Denzil, "I'd register eighteen-carat happiness better than Mary Pickford could do it in six reels. I've doped it all out more than once. I'd have a house that would make Senator Clark's Fifth Avenue birthday-cake look like a garage; I'd have a regular young navy of yachts and boats, and a whole herd of automobiles; and I'd round up a lot of poor slobs that were just like I had been, and help 'em to quit worrying and get a new start. I wouldn't sit up nights inventing new kinds of art museums and bug-houses, but I'd lay myself out to make things a little easier for the fellers that don't need anything so much as a real square meal."

"I can see the latter part of your dream," said Grove; "I believe you would do something like that—it's like you. But right here, my friend, would come the first rift in the lute. You might be wealthy and powerful enough to help ten thousand poor fellows, and then you would find about ten million more waiting to get in line—worthy and unworthy. About that time you would begin to lose interest in the private navy and the flock of autos."

"I don't want to hand myself all the bouquets in the greenhouse," responded Denzil, "but I think I'd be able to keep on an even keel. I'd manage to organize my charity business so it wouldn't keep me awake too much, and I'd certainly be happy with all the fine things in the world. I like nice things and I'd find out how to enjoy them. I ain't long on education and all that, now, but a feller picks up those things as he goes along. No, you can't talk me down if you keep at it all night, Mr. Grove."

"I won't drag in all the old stuff about health and loyal friends, and all that," replied the other, "but you can't say flatly that money buys happiness."

"It *can* buy it!" declared Denzil.

"But it won't."

"It can, and will, for me!"

Grove laughed and shook off his argumentative seriousness.

"Heigh-o! We might as well be talking politics or religion," he murmured. "Well, I hope I may live to hear you give your opinion again, after actual experience. But you had better start in soon, Mr. Denzil. Life is short and youth counts for something in the game."

Denzil nodded. He was idly fingering a copy of the Worcester *Telegram* that lay on the edge of the table. Now he picked it up suddenly and displayed its front page to his visitor.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed. "Every blamed thing on that page, after the war news, is about some rich man; they're the only ones that count! A Pittsburgh millionaire goes to Hot Springs for rheumatism cure, and he gets half a column in a Worcester paper. Helen Gould, that was, adopts an orphan kid and gets her picture in the paper once a fortnight. Here's a New York millionaire named A. Spencer Strafford. He disappeared—left his steam-yacht, and turned up missing. They found the motor tender floating, with nothing but his hat in it. Now, his lawyer comes out and says he slipped away to Europe for a lark—to take a look at the war.

"That gets over a column in the Worcester paper, and everybody's happy because the millionaire wasn't drowned. Suppose you or I had done the same thing—I mean, had fallen out of a boat: there'd be about five lines in the paper, and people would say, 'Poor slob, he was probably drunk.' That's what it means to be rich, Mr. Grove!"

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Grove smiled and gently took the paper away from him.

"You have a lively imagination," he said. "I'm more prosaic, I suppose. Now, the most interesting thing in this paper to me, at the moment, is the 'Help Wanted' column."

He turned the page and proceeded to read the advertisements he had mentioned.

"Here," he said suddenly, "is your opening. Listen to this:

"Opportunity for exceptional young man. Office and outside work. Salary and liberal commissions to the right man. Personality and initiative required. None but a live wire need apply. Call ten to twelve, A.M. Ratcliffe Realty and Development Company, Slater Building."

Denzil took back the paper and regarded the advertisement thoughtfully.

"That's all right," he said slowly, "but it's just like a lot of others."

"Of course," returned Grove, "but you always have to take your pick out of a lot. If the opportunity is really there, the exceptional man will make it different from the others by his own effort. You have the qualifications, it seems to me: I should say unhesitatingly that you have personality and initiative, and there are strong suggestions of the 'live wire' about you."

"All right, I'll go and see those people in the morning," said Denzil. "You come along with me; perhaps there'll be room for two live wires."

"I fear I'm not in that class," answered the other, shaking his head, "but I'll go with you and offer my opinion on the brilliancy of the opportunity.

"And now," he added, rising suddenly, "I think I'll take a little walk before I go to bed. I want to send one of those economical night letters to a man in New York. I couldn't think of the extravagance of a regular telegram, but I can just about stand a night letter, as you have magnanimously provided me with food and shelter for a week."

"All right," said Denzil, "I'll walk down-town with you. Sure it's a man you've got to send a wire to?"

"Nothing else!" laughed Grove. "I can't afford such luxuries as sentiment."

Denzil got his hat and coat, and considered his new friend thoughtfully. Certainly there was nothing about him to arouse suspicion, but his cool, well-bred reticence suggested something of mystery. Other men that Denzil knew talked more about themselves; this man was down and out, tramping the roads and looking for a job, yet he uttered no complaint. And Denzil admitted–to himself, with a quiet grin, that his desire to send a telegraph message aroused his curiosity.

"Come on; I'm ready," he said cheerfully.

But when they had sent the despatch, and returned, Denzil knew no more about the carefully thought-out and slowly written wire for which Grove had emptied his pockets.

CHAPTER III.

GROUNDS FOR SUSPICION.

AT the breakfast-table Arthur Grove was introduced to Mrs. Bixby's other boarders. There were the usual half-dozen of nondescript men and women who never emerged from the security of a protective reserve, and there was Mr. Marcellus Aiken, communicative and statistical, who permitted all to know that he was associated with the city government.

Young Mr. Hartley Wilson, protagonist of art and fashion, was a photographer of the advanced school, and he spoke directly of the photographic possibilities in Mr. Grove's "strikingly patrician profile."

The one "star member of the outfit," as Francis Denzil had whispered to the new boarder, was Pamela Irwin. She was a trim, self-contained young woman in the early twenties, and she combined a fresh, girlish loveliness with a capable, business-like manner in a way that at once commanded admiration and respect.

She was a stenographer to a lawyer in the State Mutual Building, and she left the table and started for her office soon after Grove and Denzil sat down. The other boarders, with the exception of two leisurely women, and Mr. Marcellus Aiken, who ate with robust appetite, drifted away

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one by one, and Mrs. Bixby took a second cup of coffee and settled herself for a half-hour of polite conversation.

"Sweet girl—Miss Irwin—don't you think?" she said to Arthur Grove. "So lovely, and so quiet and refined!"

"She seemed very charming," answered the new boarder, not without some embarrassment.

"The longer you know her, the better you like her," asserted the landlady, "and you can't say that of many people. I suppose she could have almost any man she wanted, but she scorns 'em. That's where she shows some sense. She's a niece of a very rich banker in New York—a Mr. Franklin F. Conant. If you've been much in New York, you know who he is!"

"There are so very many bankers in New York, you know," said Grove apologetically. "I may have heard of him when I was there, but I don't remember the name."

"Well, he's one of the leading ones, I believe," continued Mrs. Bixby, "and it's pretty well settled, I think, that Pamela Irwin will be a young lady of independent means when he dies."

"If statistics could be compiled," observed Mr. Marcellus Aiken dryly, "it would surprise you to know how many people there are, living on the prospects of inheriting money."

"Of course, there are many wealthy men," said Grove, "and nearly half of them have poor relatives with reasonable hopes."

"I have never heard Miss Irwin boast of a rich uncle," Denzil remarked reprovingly. "Never heard her speak of relatives, in fact."

"Oh, indeed, she never does," agreed Mrs. Bixby. "But she has letters from him frequently, and she answers them. She just happened to mention that it was her uncle she heard from, and I saw his name on the envelopes. Mr. Aiken had heard of the gentleman, and it was he told me about him."

"I looked him up in Bradstreet's," said Mr. Aiken quite unabashed, "and they rate him at over a million."

"Did Bradstreet's say he was going to hand it to his niece when he died?" demanded Denzil bluntly.

Mrs. Bixby's placid countenance became shadowed with vexation.

"I'm not one to gossip about my guests, Mr. Denzil," she replied tartly, "and Heaven knows I wouldn't say anything that wasn't pleasant about any of 'em. No one has said that Mr. Franklin F. Conant is going to leave his money to Miss Irwin, but an uncle that corresponds with his niece all the time is pretty likely to remember her in his will. It's nothing against the young lady, I'm sure, and I guess we'd all be glad to see her comfortably fixed. She could stop working for a living, then, and marry the kind of a man she cares about—if there's one good enough for her anywhere."

"Must an attractive young woman, then, provide herself with a dowry before she can hope for a suitable mate?" Grove inquired.

"Well, not exactly," answered the landlady, who began to feel that she was being heckled. "I'm not saying that Pamela Irwin needs money to attract the right kind of men; but if she could quit working and wear the right clothes and move in good society, she'd find some fine, rich gentleman pretty quick. You can't do much without money."

"I see," murmured Grove, with scarcely a suspicion of sarcasm. "The gentleman for Miss Irwin must be rich as well as fine."

"Mr. Grove hasn't said he was a socialist," interrupted Denzil, "but he sort o' laid me out last night for wanting a lot of money. It seems he's the kind of feller that's easy to satisfy. I wasn't born that way myself!"

"Me neither!" agreed Mrs. Bixby with emphasis. "By the time Mr. Grove is twenty years older he'll sing a different tune. I know whereof I speak, Mr. Grove, for I have known what it is to have money. I'm makin' no complaint, but if Mr. Bixby hadn't speculated an' lost all our money, I might be riding in my limousine now instead of taking boarders."

At ten o'clock Grove and Denzil presented themselves at the office of the Ratcliffe Realty and Development Company in the Slater Building, and were re-

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ceived by the Mr. Ratcliffe of the firm—a sharp-eyed, wiry little man, bristling with aggressiveness and energy.

Denzil made application for the position advertised, inquiring at the same time into the matter of remuneration.

"What have you done before?" demanded the little man.

"I have been a street-car conductor, movie operator, truck driver, grocery clerk, and insurance agent," answered Denzil, smiling broadly.

"Versatile!" exclaimed the other. "H-m! What makes you think you're good for this job?"

"I'm a live wire," answered Denzil gravely.

"If you do say it yourself!" countered Ratcliffe. "Well, I like modest men, if they're not too modest—and I guess you're not."

He turned to his deck and consulted a scrap of paper with a few lines of writing scrawled carelessly upon it.

"Your name's Francis Denzil, you said," he murmured. "Well, Mr. Denzil, if you think you can sell suburban lots and houses to people that don't want them and make five houses grow where only one grew before, I'll take you on for a while, to see how a real live wire works."

"The advertisement said there was a salary as well as a liberal commission," said Denzil.

"I'll pay you forty dollars a week, and talk about commissions later," was the answer.

"Wha—er—forty dollars?" gasped the applicant. "Did you say week, or was it a slip of the tongue?"

"Forty dollars a week," repeated Ratcliffe. "Not enough?"

"Say! there's something wrong—all wrong—with this job!" exclaimed Denzil dryly. "If you'd said ten per week, it would 'a' sounded natural and homelike, but—"

"Forty is what I'll pay," said the little man, a trifle impatiently, "but at the end of one week, if I see that you're not a forty-dollar man, our pleasant relations will be abruptly terminated."

"All right; that goes!" declared Denzil. "How about my friend, Mr. Grove. Got a place for him?"

Ratcliffe wheeled about and looked at Grove searchingly for a moment.

"Have I ever seen you before?" he inquired.

"I hardly think so," was the answer; "I have just arrived in Worcester."

"Want a job?"

"I am looking for work," said Grove, "but I can't honestly put myself in the live wire class."

Ratcliffe pondered for a while, frankly staring the quiet, unassuming man in the face.

"It takes all kinds to make a world," he remarked at last. "You're one of the still-waters variety; you might make a hit with the folks that are afraid of contact with live wires. I'll give you a trial, if you care to take it, at ten dollars a week and commissions."

"Great Scott!" cried Denzil; "some drop in price. If this sort o' thing keeps up I'll have to go out and have my hat stretched."

"I'll accept that, for a while," said Grove quietly. "If I can't make enough in commissions to live on, I sha'n't be worth ten dollars."

"That's the way to look at it," agreed Ratcliffe. "You're on! Now, if you'll make yourselves at home, I'll get one of our men to show you a few things about the business."

"The man who would be Crœsus is on the golden road," said Grove as Ratcliffe left the room.

"Watch me travel," returned Denzil gleefully. "But say, Grove," he added in a lower tone, "all this has got my goat! There's a little joker in it somewhere. A man doesn't hand you a forty-dollar salary without asking for references, or wanting to know if you ever robbed a bank or murdered any one. Why wasn't anything said about other fellers applying for the job? I may be some keen about my winning ways and all that, but I haven't kidded myself into thinking that a man's going to fall on my neck and hand me a gilt-edged meal-ticket the minute he claps eyes on me. What does it mean?"

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Grove shrugged his shoulders and looked equally perplexed.

"I give it up," he said. "However, he hasn't asked us to invest any money in the business, so we are in no immediate danger. If our duties involve blackmail or arson, we can resign at any moment."

CHAPTER IV.

LEARNING THINGS.

"I'D like to get my claws on just a hundred thousand dollars this week," said Frank Denzil with admirable nonchalance, as he welcomed Grove to his large, new room—the "second floor front" of Mrs. Bixby's establishment—one evening after dinner.

Grove gave a slight start and laughed dryly.

"Ha, ha! you're getting into your class!" he exclaimed. "When a man begins to think and talk in six figures, there's no such thing as holding him. Let me see," he added half-humorously, "we've been with Ratcliffe a little over a month, haven't we?"

"Um—yes," assented Denzil thoughtfully. "By Jove! I've raked in so much business that it seems more like a year. With my salary and my little bouquet of commissions, I'll pull down just about two hundred and forty dollars this week. How's that, Arthur?"

"That's quite a bit all right, for you," returned Grove ruefully. "Now, with my salary and my—my boutonnière of commissions, I shall draw about fifteen dollars this week."

Denzil sighed and looked genuinely sympathetic.

"Pretty rough for you!" he exclaimed. "You've got to get next to your job, Arthur, and learn the feel of real money. You're not—not fresh enough; you're too polite and well-bred. When a man says no, you let it go at that and drop 'im. Watch me! When a feller gets ready to throw me out or set the dog on me, I just begin to feel sure that I'll sell him something. The ones that are too anxious to do business always discourage me: they're most always pikers, with about ten dollars to invest. If a feller looks sour and don't want to see me, I know that he's guarding a real bankroll."

"You're a live wire; that's the answer to the whole problem," said Grove. "I am so heavily insulated that you can't get a spark out of me."

"Then it's time to scrape some o' that insulation off!" declared Denzil. "You stick to the job a while longer, Arthur. The dead ones come to life sometimes, and if you go on keeping such bad company as I am, you'll pick up some of my rough-neck ways.

"It's half-past seven," he added, glancing at a newly-acquired gold watch of obvious costliness: "The show at Poli's begins at quarter past eight, don't it?"

"Oh, it's the theater to-night, is it?" said Grove.

Denzil tried to conceal an air of self-consciousness.

"I'm just taking Pamela down to Poli's," he answered. "I wanted her to meet me down-town and take an early train for Boston, so's we could have dinner at the Copley-Plaza and go to a show an' come home on the midnight; but—she's a queer kind of a girl. Wouldn't listen to such an idea. Don't want men spending money on her. Said that if I was making all kinds of money, it was just the time that I ought to be saving it."

"That," returned Grove solemnly, "is the fundamental principle of the highest finance."

"Oh, sure!" Denzil agreed readily. "But no one can say that I throw my money around carelessly, can they? But say, Arthur, a young lady must be kind of interested in a feller when she begins advisin' him how to handle his cash, don't you think? Most girls would snap up an invite to dinner and a show in Boston pretty lively, but she wouldn't stand for it. Just willing to take a walk down to Poli's after dinner; and I suppose she'll stick out for an ice-cream soda after the show, instead of a regular supper at the Bancroft. I guess she wouldn't act quite like that, though, if she hated me very much. What?"

Grove smiled slightly and shook his

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head, but grew sober directly and got up to go back to his own room on the top floor.

"You needn't rush," said Denzil. "I'm not putting on a dress-suit to go to Poli's—wouldn't if I had one. You didn't say what you thought about the young lady being so keen to advise me."

Grove stopped, with his hand on the door-knob, and smiled a little wearily.

"I'm rather tired to-night," he said. "I think I'll turn in early. Hope you'll have a good time at the theater."

"Not mad, are you?" queried Denzil jocularly. "Say, look a here, Arthur; you look sort o' sore about something! You ain't— Say, old man, you ain't soft on the young lady yourself, are you? You're not jealous of your old pal?"

Grove looked pained for an instant and decidedly ill at ease; then he forced a laugh.

"Chatterbox!" he exclaimed in kindly reproof. "No, I'm neither sore at my old pal, nor jealous of him. I think that Miss Irwin is a fine girl; I admire her very much; but a man with a ten-dollar salary and a mythical income from commissions can't afford to be 'soft,' as you say, on any girl."

"Oh, that's it! But say, old top," Denzil rattled on, "I want your advice on another matter before I go, and we'll have to be quick about it. I know it ain't right to talk business with a lady, but it has to be done sometimes. I started to tell you a few minutes ago what I wanted to get a hundred thousand dollars for."

"I'm not a lady," laughed Grove, "so go ahead."

"That's coming later," said Denzil soberly. "I sold a piece of land down Webster way for the company, you know, and fixed up their mortgages and everything for 'em. The people are going to put up a big mill, to turn out war stuff, but they're short of cash. If they don't hurry up the war will be over. They want some one to put a hundred thousand into the business, and take common stock for security. Now, if I could find the man to put up that cash, I'd stand to get a little rake-off of ten per cent."

"Fine!" commented Grove, with a twinkle in his eye. "But where does the lady come in? Don't tell me you're going to borrow a hundred thousand from Mrs. Bixby or Miss Irwin!"

"Stop kidding!" protested Denzil. "I'll make it brief. Miss Irwin has got an uncle, you know—Franklin F. Conant, of New York. Well, do you think it would be too raw a deal if I talked it over with her and asked her for an introduction to her uncle? If I have a chat with the old guy, I might show him a safe investment that would be good for him and good for me."

"That's too deep water for me, Denzil," exclaimed Grove. "I hardly think J. P. Morgan or John D. Rockefeller would give much thought to a question of propriety if big business was holding the center of the stage. No, I can't say a word; you'll have to work it out for yourself."

"Well," said Denzil, scowling in puzzled thought, "I sort o' think that I'll get the big business matter out of my system first off, and then I'll apologize afterward, if it's necessary."

Grove left him and slowly climbed the stairs to his own room. He heard Denzil and Pamela Irwin leave the house a few minutes later, and he sat down and pondered certain things deeply for half an hour. After that he spread writing materials on his narrow table, under the single gas jet by the window, and began a letter.

He wrote rapidly, but gave long intervals between sentences to further thought. The letter was of such considerable length that he had just subscribed his signature to the last page when he heard the front door close with a bang, and knew by the voices in the hall that the theatergoers had returned.

A minute later Francis Denzil knocked on his door and flung it open without waiting for a response.

"It worked all right, Arthur," he announced in a mysterious whisper, "and no apologies asked for. I asked Pam—Miss Irwin—a few questions about her New York uncle, and then I just mentioned that if the old feller was looking around for easy money, I was the little man to lead him to it. I finally got her to say—after a good deal of diplomacy—that if I was going down to New York any time, she would

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give me a letter of introduction to unkie. Needless to say, I'm going to-morrow."

"It's incredible, what straight, unadulterated nerve will accomplish!" exclaimed Grove. "Well, I wish you luck, Denzil; but it's not the easiest thing in the world to make a New York man hand over a hundred thousand dollars just because you want it. New York and Missouri have their easy ones, with all the rest, but the fellows that have succeeded in getting money and holding on to it, are wise in their generation."

"If I don't come back with at least part of the money, I'll stand dinner for the two of us at any hotel you name," rejoined Denzil gaily. "Now I'll go to bed and get some rest before I begin my little drive on the New York trenches. Gee! when you write a letter you write one, don't you?"

He glanced casually at the fat envelope that Grove had just sealed.

"As we're very frank with each other," said Grove, speaking good-humoredly, "I take the liberty to caution you on a matter of tact and discretion. No matter how well you know a man, don't let your interest in him extend to his correspondence. If any one should ask you to-morrow if I wrote a letter to some one to-night, you should be able to disclaim any knowledge of my actions. Correspondence is one of the few things in which a man may enjoy a certain amount of privacy."

"Gad! you're a mysterious sort of guy!" exclaimed Denzil, only slightly abashed. "All right, I apologize. I'm learning things all the time."

CHAPTER V.

A BIT BEWILDERING.

TWO evenings later, Arthur Grove and Miss Irwin were sitting on the piazza, chatting comfortably after the dispersal of the other boarders, when a telegraph boy brought a message to the former.

Grove opened the envelope and held the paper up to catch the rays from the flickering hall-lamp.

He uttered a little gasp, then laughed with surprise and a certain satisfaction.

"This is from Mr. Denzil," he said, "and the message is for you as well as me, Miss Irwin. Shall I read it to you?"

She nodded, with a slight constraint.

"It says," he went on: "'Landed the whole wad from Conant. Tell Pamela. Home to-morrow.'"

Miss Irwin laughed, rather uncomfortably.

"That's splendid for him, isn't it?" she murmured. "That's such a lot of money to ask for; but men seem to handle money in large sums with something like contempt. I don't really know my uncle very well, and I had no idea how he would receive Mr. Denzil. I never dreamed that such a transaction could be put through in two days."

"If I had attempted to get a hundred thousand cents in a similar manner," said Grove, "I should now be under arrest as a suspicious person, or retreating in disorder from my Waterloo."

The girl smiled sympathetically.

"Mr. Denzil says that you have all the good breeding, and he has all the nerve," she said. "I wonder sometimes, Mr. Grove, if good breeding isn't something of a handicap commercially. People with nerve, as they call it, but with little education, become wealthy in a short time, and they are apparently esteemed more highly by the community than the quiet, well-bred people who have no money."

"Educated failures," answered Grove, "are not popular. I suppose there's nothing interesting about them. Now, in Denzil's case, he admits cheerfully that he never bothered about education or culture, but who could help liking him? He has such a good heart and he radiates such overwhelming optimism and good cheer, that I fancy he would win popularity in almost any circle. With plenty of money, a man like that can fortify himself against society and hold his position. A poor man's polished manners usually excite more ridicule than admiration."

"It's very much the same with the women," said Miss Irwin. "If I had less education and reserve—which is a sort of timidity—I should plunge into the business world and make something more than a

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stenographer's salary. Then I could have the things I want, and I suppose I should enjoy life better than I do. If I were less sensitive I shouldn't be irritated by Mrs. Bixby's chatter, or by having Mr. Denzil call me Pamela after knowing me a month."

She laughed as she mentioned Denzil's familiarity, and Grove echoed the laugh, but looked a trifle pained.

"Denzil has the idea that it would be unfriendly to call any one by a formal title after getting acquainted," he said loyally. "He called me Arthur the second day of our acquaintance. You know, of course, that he would never dream of showing you anything but the highest respect."

"Oh, of course!" she said heartily. "If I didn't understand Mr. Denzil I shouldn't accept his friendship. I think, with you, that he is quite wonderful. His whole mind is set, now, upon money; but I think that if he had money—lots of it—he would expand and develop a rather unusual personality."

"Money, of course, is the great developer," murmured Grove. "Every one wants money first—all other desirable things will follow."

"Mr. Denzil says that every one but you, Mr. Grove, is after money. He thinks that you are the one great exception. He can't understand how such a charming gentleman can live without money and feel so little desire for it."

"Perhaps I conceal my desire for wealth," replied Grove, with a good-humored shrug. "Oh, no; I am perfectly human and I want money as much as any one. It's a very necessary thing. But, you see, I am not one of the great money hunters. I fancy that I can save money, but I haven't the faculty for getting it; so I have to comfort myself with all the philosophy I can summon to my aid. That, I suppose, is what makes me seem indifferent."

The girl shook her head commiseratingly.

"I wouldn't give up to philosophy too much, if I were you," she counseled. "Take a leaf from Mr. Denzil's book, and 'go after it,' as he says. If you tried very hard, you might surprise yourself."

"Ah!" laughed Grove, with just a shade of bitterness, "you see, you haven't escaped the spell that money casts upon everybody: you are pitying me, just as Denzil does. Do you really think, Miss Irwin, that money would make you happy?"

"I wouldn't say that flatly!" she replied, a little petulantly. "I am certainly not happy without money, for I have too much to think of—too much conserving of resources and careful contriving! If I had money enough to make my future comfortably secure, I should have time to think more of being happy."

She said good night presently and went into the house, and Grove sat for a long time in thought.

He felt vaguely humiliated and discredited. He had been branded with the grave stigma of slothfulness and indifference. He neither had money, nor craved it, and society has little room for such a man.

Denzil came home on the following day, radiant, and panting for new worlds to conquer. With a commission of ten thousand dollars about to fall into his pocket, he was prepared to face the financial world and give battle on any terms.

He told Grove of a man who had turned five thousand dollars into eighty thousand after a day or two of precarious stock manipulation, and his eyes glistened.

"Careful, old chap!" cried Grove in genuine alarm. "Hold on to your ten thousand long enough to enjoy the sensation of having it. You'll plunge into some bucket-shop juggling, and then—back to the starting point again!"

"Why, sure!" chuckled Denzil, undismayed. "You've got to risk a loss now and then or travel with the slow coaches. If I make a bad move, there'll be a few more of these commissions coming to me, and one of these days I'll clean up a wad worth hanging on to. Buck up, Arthur, and get aboard the band-wagon! I'm going to pull you along with me, anyhow. If you won't dig for yourself, I'll make you my private secretary when I land in big company, and you'll have to take the salary in spite of yourself."

One evening in the following week an elderly stranger came home to dinner with Denzil and electrified the boarding-house

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party for an instant by seizing Miss Irwin in his arms and embracing her with paternal affection.

When he was introduced as the girl's uncle, Franklin F. Conant, of New York, the excitement subsided in a measure, and Mrs. Bixby hastened to give him the seat of honor and accord him the courtesies due a famous financier from the metropolis.

It became known presently that he had run up to Worcester to confer with Denzil's principals upon the large investment that he was making in their enterprise, and, incidentally, for the rare pleasure of visiting his lovely niece.

After dinner Denzil entertained his guest, the girl, and Arthur Grove in his commodious room, insisting upon the presence of the last-named as his most intimate friend and confidant.

Conant was an expansive man of some sixty years, hearty in manner and on the best of terms with himself and all humanity. To Grove's critical eye he was just a thought too loose-lipped and roving-eyed.

"Mr. Denzil has spoken uncommonly well of you, Mr. Grove," he remarked genially. "I hope to get better acquainted with you while I am here. Denzil, I dare say you know, has adroitly separated me from a fair sum of money, and I declare I can't do anything but admire a young man that can accomplish that.

"If the truth were known, gentlemen, I fear that I am making the investment more in Mr. Denzil than in the enterprise he represents. After hearing him talk for two days I felt that I had to be associated with him. When you see a man that makes money, stick to him everywhere he goes, it's best to trail along with that man and be on his side. The other side is going to lose out sooner or later."

Denzil affected a deprecating manner, but his face beamed and Grove knew that he was wallowing in his natural element.

Pamela Irwin was prettily bewildered by the contagious enthusiasm of her distinguished uncle, and Grove perceived that her glances at Denzil were unmistakably colored with a certain admiration.

"Now, while we have this pleasant party of good friends all together here," said Mr. Conant, "I am going to give my pretty niece a little surprise, and I hope it won't embarrass her too much. She writes me such charming, cheerful letters that I can't gain much idea of her real state of mind from them; but our friend, Denzil, has told me a thing or two—of how hard and faithfully she works with little recreation and few of the good things of life."

Pamela blushed painfully and made a protesting gesture.

"It's very good of Mr. Denzil to feel so much interest in me," she said slowly, "but I'm afraid that he has overdrawn the real state of affairs. I don't mind working; I'm thankful to be able to earn my living, and I don't think I have to work very hard."

"That's the kind of a girl that deserves a reward of merit!" Conant declared. "I'm glad that you're not ashamed of honest labor, my dear, and I wouldn't do anything to discourage worthy ambition. I've been thinking for a long time, however, and my little talk with Denzil the other day crystallized my rambling thoughts.

"Too many of us old fellows hang on to our cash until we are dead, and then we can't have the pleasure of seeing benefits bestowed upon our heirs. I'm good for twenty years more, I hope, but I have a few relatives that doubtless need money right now much more than they may need it in a score of years. So, my friends, I'm going to have the pleasure of seeing *their* pleasure; I'm going to open my pocket and make a few little gifts."

Pamela was trembling now with vague embarrassment and confusion.

"I beg your pardon," said Grove rising; "I think I should withdraw before you go any further into such a private matter."

"Our little Lord Chesterfield is very keen on etiquette, Mr. Conant," said Denzil merrily.

"Your delicacy does you credit, Mr. Grove," remarked Conant, "but we would not be robbed of your good company. I want Pamela's friends to enjoy her little bit of good fortune with her. I'll be brief and to the point: I have here a certified check for ten thousand dollars, and I am proud to give it to my dear little niece, to do with as she sees fit."

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"Squander it in fripperies and frivolities, my dear Pamela," he continued, pressing the paper into her shaking hand; "put it into the savings bank, buy yourself a house—do anything with it that your fancy dictates, but do not worry yourself with too much gratitude to your adoring uncle."

The girl unconsciously crumpled the check in her hand and began to cry softly. She kissed her uncle with becoming feeling, but was obviously too overwhelmed to think clearly of what had happened.

Denzil gave a war-whoop of pure joy.

"Fine business!" he shouted. "I wish I had such an uncle! Well, I can't claim to be the only rich person in the house now, can I?"

Grove murmured perfunctory congratulations, but felt himself sharing the girl's confusion. He suggested guardedly that she might be too excited to talk about the gift that evening, and that he, for one, would say good night.

Pamela admitted that she wanted to be alone, to think the whole thing out for herself, and she shook hands with each of the young men and bade them good night.

"You have my best wishes and my congratulations," said Grove softly, as he took her hand. "It's odd, isn't it, and startling, so soon after our conversation about money."

She smiled slightly and nodded.

"I suppose that you, for one, don't envy me," she said. "Well, I really don't know what to think, I am too bewildered!"

"Yes," returned Grove, "I can fancy that—that ten thousand dollars might be a bit bewildering!"

CHAPTER VI.

GOING TOO FAR.

"WELL, I'm going to quit the ancient and honorable Ratcliffe Realty and Development Company, Arthur," announced Denzil one evening, as the two friends walked up Pleasant Street. "I'm making altogether too much money for other people."

"I knew that it would come to that," said Grove solemnly. "I suppose it would be idle for me to say anything about letting ambition take the bit in its teeth and run away."

"Sure! I've got the whole thing doped out right," replied Denzil. "Friend Conant is crazy about getting into things around here, and he's willing to start me out with a little company of my own. He'll be the president, and give the business the prestige that his name carries, but I'll run the thing. And you, my boy, are to be the treasurer! Nothing to do, you lazy dog, but sit in the office and handle the cush!"

Grove shook his head violently and raised a protesting hand.

"Nothing like that, Denzil!" he exclaimed. "It sounds like a fine thing for you, and I wish you every success, but I won't be dragged into the business through your friendship. I couldn't get such a job as that if I tried ten years, and it's too much of a gift to accept."

"You make me good and sick!" cried Denzil indignantly. "For two cents, Arthur, I'd tell you just exactly what kind of a poor nut you are! Do you think for a minute that I'd handicap a new business with a boob for a treasurer, if I thought you were one? Say! do you think I'm as easy as all that? I want an honest guy to handle my money, and I don't know many of 'em besides you."

"Good Lord! you wouldn't put a plugged nickel in a slot-machine to get candy for a starving baby—that's you! Forget the friendship business! I want you for my treasurer, and I want you so bad that I'll give you the measly salary of a hundred dollars a week."

"That settles it!" exclaimed Grove. "I'm not worth a hundred dollars a week to any business. If the job is simply one of bookkeeping and accounting I dare say that I could give—well, ordinary satisfaction; but you could get just as good a man for much less. No, sir! Never!"

"Just plain fool!" remarked Denzil witheringly. "The worst of it is, you're such a stubborn jackass that you'll stick to that! Say! I'll come down to seventy-five. How about it?"

Grove shook his head grimly.

"Fifty!" cried Denzil savagely.

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"The title of treasurer sounds large," said Grove, "but the office is merely that of cashier and bookkeeper. Thirty-five a week would be good pay for such a man; you could get one for less."

"Will you take it at thirty-five, you poor slob?" groaned Denzil.

"Yes, I'll do that to avoid further abuse," said Grove, laughing at the positive anger of his friend.

"Then that's a go!" and the other sighed with relief. "And I guess that's the first time an employer was ever forced to cut down wages to suit an employee."

Pamela Irwin was sitting on the piazza as they reached the Chatham Street house. She was still—to the wonderment of the boarding-house—employed as a stenographer, but she showed her appreciation of improved fortune by a greater elegance in dress and a certain air of comfortable independence.

"Allow me to introduce Mr. Arthur Grove, the treasurer of the Conant Investment Company," said Denzil flippantly, as the two men walked up the steps.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried the girl. "Isn't that fine for you, Mr. Grove? Mr. Denzil told me about the new company last night, and that he was going to offer you the position. I know that my uncle will be pleased when he hears that you have accepted it."

"A man that can earn real money, and won't, must be made to do so," asserted Denzil.

Grove flushed slightly. He knew that Denzil's motives were nothing if not kind and friendly, but it was like a man of Denzil's type to boast a little, indirectly.

"It seems," said Grove, forcing a smile, "that I have allowed myself to become something of an object of charity."

"Oh, I wouldn't feel like that!" protested the girl. "If your friends are convinced of your worth, and they insist upon recognizing it in such a way, you should be very proud."

"Say, Pamela," exclaimed Denzil, "if any one should ever offer Grove a thousand dollars for something or other, he wouldn't survive the insult! He's still sore at me for offering him a hundred a week. I tell you, I had to come right down to thirty-five, or I don't know but he'd 'a' beaten me up. I ain't sure now but what he'll hand over part of that thirty-five to some charity fund every week to clear his conscience."

Pamela smiled broadly, but fell silent as she perceived Grove's uneasiness.

Franklin Conant came in from New York that evening, and there was the usual gathering in Denzil's room while he outlined the plans of the Conant Investment Company to the new treasurer, whom he hailed with enthusiasm.

With certain modifications, the successful policy of the Ratcliffe offices was to be imitated. Several desirable parcels of land on the Shrewsbury side of Lake Quinsigamond were to be acquired and developed for building plots in the most approved New York manner. Then Mr. Conant proposed to extend the activities to the development of factory sites among the towns along the railroad lines.

"We are merely breaking new ground in an already fertile field," he explained. "Worcester, you know, is the center of a district teeming with industrial activity, and sufficient unto itself. The conditions are peculiar, and not easily explained. Worcester is, I believe, one of the forty largest cities in the country, yet you will rarely find it mentioned, even to a trifling news item, in metropolitan newspapers.

"In a political crisis, or any event of national importance, the New York papers print extracts from the editorial pages of journals in such places as Springfield; Houston, Texas; or Youngstown, Ohio; Worcester is seldom, if ever, quoted. However, progress goes merrily on, and Worcester pays little attention to her neighbors. She is, as I say, sufficient unto herself; she asks no favors from the world without."

Denzil listened to the words of authority with rapt interest; Grove found himself getting slightly bored; and Pamela Irwin gave her beneficent relative respectful attention.

"We are going into business on large lines," continued Conant, with conviction. "We shall issue stock, and I believe that

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those who secure even a few shares of our common stock will be very fortunate indeed. We shall present a few shares to our modest treasurer as a bonus; and I think so well of our prospects that I am going to advise my dear little niece to invest a portion of her capital in the stock."

"Couldn't do better than that!" declared Denzil fervently.

Grove offered a characteristic objection to the proposed benefit for him, but he was more concerned at the moment with the last suggestion. He was rather amazed that the New York financier should virtually tie a string to the money so lately acquired by the girl. Had he offered her a block of stock as an additional gift, it would have been graceful and natural; but to dictate her policy with regard to the ten thousand seemed rather arbitrary. However, the uncle's intentions were doubtless of the best.

Pamela, on her part, looked surprised and, it seemed, a little disappointed. She hastened to agree with her experienced and sagacious relative, however.

"That will be very nice for me, I'm sure," she said quietly, "and it is kind of you to give me the opportunity. That will be better than leaving my money in the savings-banks at such a low rate of interest, won't it?"

"Pooh!" snorted Conant. "Savings-banks are for the timid—for those who lack imagination!"

"Too lively an imagination," the prudent Grove was constrained to say, "has taken a good many thousands out of savings-banks and dumped them into bucket-shops, I believe."

Denzil slapped his knee and chuckled deeply.

"There you have him, Mr. Conant!" he cried. "Anything over four per cent is too much money for old Arthur Grove. If a bank cashier should offer him five per cent he'd beat it to the teller's window to pull out his account!"

"You couldn't make a bigger hit with me, my friend, than to display this admirable conservativeness," remarked Conant, coming to Grove's relief. "Don't let an excess of caution hold you back in business, but never be ashamed to look your ground over before you begin to build. I can see, sir, that you will be something of a check upon this ebullient young promoter of ours.

"I must be strolling down-town," he added, glancing at his watch. "I registered at the Bancroft, but didn't stop to have a room assigned me. I suppose you young men will be seeking more luxurious quarters presently; this boarding-house will be a bit tame for you."

"I am quite satisfied with it," answered Grove.

"I shall stay for a while," said Denzil, with a mysterious air, and cast a meaning look at Pamela.

Conant intercepted the glance and burst into hearty laughter.

"Ha, ha! an attraction!" he exclaimed. "That's fortunate for the worthy landlady, isn't it? My word, Denzil, I wish I could make a pretty girl blush like that!"

"Really, Uncle Franklin!" protested the girl, her flush deepening to crimson.

"Now, now!" went on the elderly man mercilessly. "If you keep on like that, my dear, with such blushes and such eyes, you'll turn the young man's head indeed!"

"As though it could be turned any more!" cried Denzil, the irrepressible. "Miss Pamela knows pretty well what my sentiments are, I guess."

Pamela got up abruptly, her eyes flashing, and glanced angrily from her uncle to the overfrank young man.

"Come now, Pamela; there's no one here but your friends," said Conant fatuously. "I wouldn't be so touchy if I were you. Many a girl would be proud to have the attention of Mr. Denzil. For my part, I can't think of any young man that would be more acceptable to me as a nephew."

Arthur Grove, taking no pains to conceal his anger and disgust, started to leave the room; but Pamela was before him. With her handkerchief pressed to her burning face, she darted to the door, flung it open, and disappeared in the darkness of the hall.

Denzil laughed foolishly, but looked scared and perplexed.

"I've found out," he said awkwardly, "that this is no place for plain talk. I

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get called down good and proper every time I try to say what I really think. Now, you see, Pamela's sore and Arthur Grove is on his high horse!"

"But in such an intimate circle!" exclaimed Conant, beginning to feel injured.

"Intimacy has its law of limitations!" declared Grove, and walked gravely out of the room.

"Oh, splash!" cried Denzil mockingly. "Let's all go get ice-cream sodas!"

CHAPTER VII.

ONE WORD.

MRS. BIXBY called Grove into the parlor one evening, when the handsomely furnished offices of the Conant Investment Company had been open about a month.

"Here's the money!" she gasped in an awesome whisper, as she sat down and solemnly lifted three fat rolls of bank-notes from an ancient hand-bag. "There's five hundred in each of these rolls, and a thousand dollars in twenties and tens in the other."

Grove was astonished.

"Two thousand dollars!" he exclaimed. "But what for, Mrs. Bixby? I haven't heard anything about it before."

"I thought you knew!" she protested. "You're the treasurer, ain't you? Mr. Conant was kind enough to tell me all about your company. He advised me to put all my money into it. I can tell you, I appreciated it—a busy man like him! I got the thousand dollars out of the savings-bank, and the two rolls of five hundred are just as they laid in my safe-deposit box at the Worcester Trust Company."

Grove smiled slightly, but at once grew grave again.

"You had half of your money lying idle in a safe-deposit box?" he queried.

"Indeed!" she answered; "I wouldn't have all my money in a bank. Banks fail sometimes. Nothing can happen to money in a safe-deposit box."

"Yet you are willing to trust all your money to a speculative investment!" Grove exclaimed wonderingly.

Mrs. Bixby's eyes widened, and for a moment she showed consternation, but it passed quickly.

"Isn't Mr. Conant one of the biggest money men in New York?" she said argumentatively. "He's the head of this concern, isn't he? Of course, Mr. Grove, it's perfectly right and proper for you to tell a poor widow like me to be careful of her money, but there's no reason why I shouldn't take a good chance to double it."

"Mr. Conant said that you could double your money?" queried Grove.

"Not exactly; but it amounted to that. And he said that you, Mr. Grove, weren't a man to go into anything that wasn't as safe and sure as the rising sun."

Grove suddenly bethought him that his attitude was scarcely one of loyalty to his employers, but his perplexed conscience prompted him to add a final admonition.

"I have every confidence in the enterprise, to be sure," he said, "and I know something of the great possibilities in real-estate development; but nothing is absolutely certain in the business world. Mr. Conant is a wealthy man, but not more prominently so than hundreds of others in New York, and you must bear in mind that men as shrewd and successful as the great Jay Gould have failed and gone into bankruptcy."

Mrs. Bixby regarded the young man intently, with something strangely like disapproval.

"I am a poor widow," she said plaintively, "and though two thousand dollars is all the money I've got, it isn't very much, and it couldn't do me any great amount of good. If I can put it into your company and double it, and then perhaps double it again, and go on making more money all the time, I can give up takin' boarders and live as a lady ought to live, I guess."

"Of course," agreed Grove helplessly, and abandoned the argument, knowing the futility of trying to dissuade the average human being from embracing any means to the acquisition of "easy money."

Two of the ancient women boarders listened to Mrs. Bixby's counsel and took stock in the company; Mr. Marcellus Aiken, ex-star boarder, made a conserva-

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tive investment of three hundred dollars —" just to watch it double "—and Francis Denzil's considerable following of old customers rushed into the project eagerly.

The stock was taken up with such flattering confidence that Mr. Conant came over from New York one day and held a meeting with Denzil, Grove, and a pile of proxies around him. He proposed a supplementary issue of stock. The desirability of such an action was made plain to Denzil, but Grove opposed it vigorously. A stock vote was taken, however, and the opposing minority, consisting of Mr. Arthur Grove, was hopelessly swamped.

Money was needed at once for the elaborate development of the " Pompeiian Villa Plots," on a remote tract of farm land between Shrewsbury and Grafton, so the new issue of stock was amply justified.

To the surprise and evident delight of Mr. Conant—and the ecstasy of Francis Denzil—a New York broker made a ten-thousand-dollar purchase of the new stock —a man named Wells Haverford, by no means unknown in Wall Street.

" It was my name that did it, you see," Conant remarked frankly. " I'm not even personally acquainted with Wells Haverford, but he's a big toad in the puddle, and he handles the business of such men as A. Spencer Strafford and that bunch of millionaires. I wouldn't care to have many of those fellows get in and try to control things, but Wells Haverford is too big a man to trouble us very much, and he is evidently willing to trust some of his clients' money to my tender care."

Presently Mr. Conant did a remarkable thing. He made over his entire holdings of stock in the company, with a face value of something above fifty thousand dollars, to his niece. The same day he held a meeting, with his faithful proxies around him, resigned the office of president, and voted Mr. Denzil his successor.

Denzil showed no surprise, however, and accepted the promotion with gratitude and apparently complete understanding.

Grove, completely in the dark, was filled with amazement; but when he intimated as much to Denzil, the latter evaded his inquiries almost curtly, and for the first time in their acquaintanceship a coolness developed between them.

Grove dined at the boarding-house, but Denzil and Pamela Irwin were absent, evidently having dinner with Conant at some down-town restaurant.

After eating in moody silence Grove went to his room and sat for an hour in the darkness, thinking things out for himself. He reviewed the brief history of the Conant Investment Company, and he found new inconsistencies, new puzzles, in many of the transactions that Conant had put through with the high hand of authority.

Some time after nine o'clock, just as he had lighted the gas and laid out materials for certain personal correspondence, the maid knocked at his door and announced that Miss Irwin would like to see him in the parlor.

Pamela was alone when he entered, and he saw at once, even by the sickly light of the two gas-jets, that she had been crying—violently, by all the signs.

She found her voice only after a strong effort to control herself.

" I—I shouldn't have sent for you, Mr. Grove," she said apologetically, " but—I had to talk to some one."

" I am glad you sent for me," said Grove simply.

" Mr. Denzil walked back to the hotel with my uncle after they brought me home," she explained. " I can't think for myself, so I must talk to some one before he returns."

" I hope I shall be able to help you, if it is possible," returned Grove.

She smiled slightly, but without mirth.

" You'll think it very absurd of me," she began, " but—money is the principal source of my trouble. I have received a present of fifty thousand dollars, or its equivalent."

" It's not unusual to find money the source of trouble," Grove observed dryly, " but the complaint is, usually, that some one has *not* received fifty thousand dollars. Please go on, Miss Irwin. I heard something of the case; I understood that you were to receive a large gift of stock."

" It's too mysterious, too unreasonable!" she declared. " No one can explain to me

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why my uncle should retire so suddenly and so soon from the presidency of the company. And to give me all of his stock—that is simply preposterous and beyond understanding."

"I think that I would calm myself if I were you," Grove said gently, "and then await further developments without worrying about them."

"But that is just what I can't do!" she cried, once more on the verge of tears. "I hardly know how to tell you, Mr. Grove, but I am practically to be forced also to accept the gift, yet forced to accept it conditionally. My uncle seems to feel that I am much in his debt, and he assumes all the authority of a parent or a guardian."

"I suppose that the conditions he imposes are of too private a nature for me to know," said Grove.

"I have got to tell you," answered the girl, growing more vehement. "My uncle says that his physician has ordered a rest for him, and he is going to travel extensively. He has made up his mind that I am to—to— Oh, he has practically commanded me to marry Mr. Denzil—at once!"

Grove uttered a gasp of consternation, then shut his lips tightly and was silent for a moment. When he spoke it was in a hard, cold voice.

"I don't think you need worry," he said; "Denzil is not that sort of a man."

"Oh, but you don't know!" she cried. "You don't know what an absolute egoist he has become, Mr. Grove. He means to be kind, in his way, I suppose, but he insists—Mr. Denzil insists, I tell you, that I don't know my own mind. He agrees with my uncle that the match would be an ideal one. He told me that I should consider my uncle's wishes—that we would be very rich and supremely happy."

"Denzil is beside himself!" exclaimed Grove. "His head is turned. It is really hard to believe, for I know Denzil to be a good fellow, warm-hearted and generous. His prosperity has come upon him too rapidly—too easily."

"But what shall I do, Mr. Grove?" she demanded desperately. "I have no place to go. I have no money—not enough to afford me any independence—for I put it all into stock, you see. My uncle tried to force me to take his great gift of stock to-night. He urged me to take it, and then think calmly of what he wished me to do. He said that I would come to the realization, in a day or two, that I was fortunate to have the—the love of a man like Mr. Denzil. I ought to be more self-reliant, but I am—oh, I am panic-stricken!"

"First of all," said Grove calmly, "you must control yourself. No one can force you to marry Mr. Denzil if you do not want to. Then, I must beg you to take my advice, without giving you all my reasons for it. Please accept the stock from your uncle, and be sure to give him at least a dollar for it, to make the transaction legal. You can turn it back to him at any time, you know."

"But that will be as good as accepting Mr. Denzil's proposal," she protested.

"No," said Grove firmly, "it won't. There are reasons—just reasons—why you should take the stock. As for marrying Mr. Denzil, I will undertake to assure you that you need never do that except of your free will. I may seem a bit arrogant, in my turn, but I know more of the circumstances of the Conant Investment Company than you do, and I can exert a strong influence upon your uncle and Mr. Denzil if it becomes necessary."

They heard, suddenly, a step upon the piazza.

"It's Mr. Denzil—coming back!" Pamela gasped; and at a quick nod and a commanding gesture from Grove she flew out of the parlor and up the stairs.

Denzil let himself in with his latch-key and passed through the dimly lighted hall. His roving glance took in Grove, now seated again in the parlor, but he did not pause.

"Oh, hello!" he called out rather stiffly, and started up the stairs.

"Denzil," Grove said sharply, "come in here! I want to talk with you."

The other stepped back and entered the room with a scowl of impatience and surprise.

"What's up, old schoolmaster?" he de-

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manded half facetiously. "Fire away, and let me go to bed; I'm tired."

Grove did not get up, but regarded him with an irritating superiority from his chair.

"I'll be brief," he said. "No matter what plans you may have with Mr. Conant, I want you to understand that his niece, Miss Irwin, is not to be bulldozed into doing anything against her will."

"Good God!" cried Denzil, his eyes snapping savagely. "Why, you damned, impudent—"

"That's enough!" exclaimed Grove, springing up and checking the other's outburst with the cold authority of his bearing. "We will have no discussion—no argument. I have just this to say: I am in a position to exert a certain control over your actions. You may tell Conant—if you wish—that I can utter one word which will dissolve the Conant Investment Company and upset your most carefully laid plans."

Denzil laughed derisively.

"You mean, I suppose," he said, "that you can tear off one of your virtuous orations and make us ashamed of living!"

"I said 'one word,' and I meant it literally," replied Grove.

"One word!" Denzil echoed disdainfully, and laughed with vast amusement.

"One word!" repeated Grove grimly, and something in his cold, fixed gaze banished the leering grin from Denzil's face.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TIME FOR DISAPPEARING.

THE suave and benignant Mr. Conant came to Arthur Grove early next morning in the office, Denzil being conveniently absent.

"My dear boy," he began, with a considerable show of feeling, "I was never so shocked and grieved in my life! It's all a wretched misunderstanding, I assure you. But we shall fix it up—yes, indeed, we shall fix it up! Nothing must come between such friends as you and Denzil."

"I fear that there's very little misunderstanding about it, in the sense that you mean," replied Grove. "Miss Irwin gave me a fairly clear idea of what happened, and, aside from that, I have had a chance to make observations for myself."

"Pamela is a dear, sweet, silly little girl!" Conant declared with tender severity. "I shall have a talk with her about these hysterical outbreaks. Ah, it takes a woman to set men by the ears, doesn't it? Why, my dear Grove, I wouldn't do anything to make her unhappy for all the world. I dare say that in her overwrought state of mind she gave you to understand that I was harsh and overbearing with her. The contrary was the case. I gave her advice, I showed her how to provide for a happy future, and I did it gently and affectionately."

"With a fifty-thousand-dollar reward 'for a good child,'" Grove broke in. "As a matter of fact, Conant, I do not think that Miss Irwin is mercenary enough to be swayed by such a consideration, but you put her at a disadvantage by making the magnificent gift and then telling her what what you required in return."

"Outrageous!" cried Conant indignantly. "I knew that you were misinformed. No, sir; I made the gift freely, without conditions; then I casually mentioned my earnest hope of seeing her happily married to a fine fellow with the brilliant future that Denzil unquestionably has before him."

"The brilliant future being signalized mainly by a rapidly growing bank account," said Grove ironically.

"You speak peculiarly of your friend, who has done so much to help you and give you a position in the world," remarked the older man.

"I would say the same to him!" declared Grove. "And I will. Denzil is a good fellow, if he doesn't lose his head entirely in this scramble for money; but he has far to go to be the social and intellectual equal of Miss Irwin. I will tell him that, also, and explain it to his satisfaction."

"My niece is a girl to be proud of," said Conant, "but she has been a—a working woman, so to speak, with no prospects. I realized her unusual character

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and personality, and I have made it possible for her to aspire to any position that a lady of wealth may hold."

"You arrogate rather large powers to yourself, Mr. Conant," observed Grove. "Miss Irwin is a gentlewoman; she chose to earn her livelihood in the most practical way at her command; but she might reasonably aspire to any position, regardless of you, sir, or of money. The dowry is not an American institution; wives are not contracted for on commercial terms."

Conant became acrimonious.

"You speak with a good deal of authority, Grove," he said, "for a young man of no position whatever. Who do you think you are, anyway?"

Grove smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"I?" he murmured quietly. "Why, I am a bystander—a looker-on, with an intense interest in my fellow mortals. It doesn't take money, you know, to enable one to study humanity, and I dare say my opinions are as good as though I had a rating in Bradstreet's."

Conant sniffed and dismissed the argument with a wry face.

"The whole thing boils down to this, young man," he said. "You are poor and without prospects; you haven't ability enough to climb from a bookkeeper's stool to the top of the desk; but you give yourself airs and have the impudence to be jealous of Denzil, your benefactor."

Grove's eyes flashed dangerously for an instant, then he laughed and irritated the older man further by regarding him with a coolly reflective eye.

"No," he said slowly, "I am not jealous. As you have so clearly expressed it, in several ways, I am not a man of marriageable position, according to prevailing opinions. I have permitted myself to admire Miss Irwin and enjoy her acquaintance, but a stronger feeling, approaching jealousy, is more than I could allow myself."

"Well, I can't stand here listening to your chatter," muttered Conant. "I thought that if you were disposed to be reasonable, and if you had any excuse to offer for your behavior toward Denzil, I would let you down easy; but you're an insufferable upstart! I suppose you'll at least have the decency to resign and get out of here."

"I haven't decided as to that," said Grove, bringing a gasp of astonishment from the other. "However, I'll consider the situation and let you know. I shall have to see, first, how things develop. I am a stockholder in this company, you see, and I am curious as to your actions during the last twenty-four hours. I may have some questions for you to answer."

"Questions!" snorted Conant. "*You* question *me!*"

"I may have to ask you a number of things," answered Grove, "about delays in developing our property after the funds for such development have been drawn from the treasury. I may be so inquisitive as to ask you how you really acquired the fifty thousand dollars' worth of stock that you are transferring to Miss Irwin. I may become so personal that I shall ask a question of a more intimate nature."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Conant sharply, becoming visibly uneasy. "What is it that you are so curious about?"

"I won't put the question to you now," answered Grove, "but I may ask you where you got the ten thousand dollars that you so generously gave to your niece—I may inquire if you were actually the donor."

Conant started back and grew purple with fury.

"This comes of putting a beggar on horseback!" he cried, after breaking the tension with a volley of inarticulate imprecations. "To humor that poor, soft-hearted Denzil, I set you up in the world, knowing all the time that you were no good—simply no good! I have myself to blame. The result is the same ninety-nine times out of a hundred. Swelled head! Jealousy! Ingratitude!

"Now!" he panted, after a moment's pause for breath; "go ahead with all the questions you have to ask! You're talking to Franklin F. Conant; do you realize that? Do you realize that I can break a man just as quickly as I can make him?

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I can fix it so that you can't get a job in any reputable business house in the East, young man. My time is valuable, though; I can't waste energy on a puppy like you. But—if I was so disposed—I have more than one kind of influence: I could have you put behind bars and kept there, too!"

Grove continued to gaze at the infuriated man calmly and searchingly.

"I wonder how much power you could show, financially or otherwise, if any one should call your bluff," he said thoughtfully. "A man who advertises himself so broadly is one to be watched carefully. You have your rating in Bradstreet's now, and you talk rather too much about it. A rating, you see, can be lost overnight. If I should apply to Bradstreet's to-day for a confidential report on your standing, I—"

Conant cut him short with a oath.

"That 'll be all from you!" he shouted. "I won't stand here in my own office and be insulted by a whippersnapper of a clerk!"

"Your actions would lead me to apply for that confidential report," said Grove.

"Report!" cried the older man wildly. "Say! I am Franklin F. Conant! What d'you think you can find out about me, you—"

The end of his speech and the reply that was ready on Grove's lips were not heard. A man flung open the office door and darted in, frantically waving a newspaper.

He was flushed with excitement and fairly disheveled, as from a wild dash through the streets, and Grove scarcely recognized him as a man who had lately invested two hundred dollars in the stock of the company.

"Here's the *Evening Gazette!*" he gasped. "Have yer seen it? What kind o' flimflam yer runnin' here, anyhow? New York millionaire was condescendin' to head your company, was he? How about 'im? What yer got to say about it?"

Grove stared at the man, open-mouthed and speechless with amazement. He turned toward Conant to see how he received this unexpected flank attack, and was further amazed to see that prominent financier glide furtively to the door and disappear silently from the office.

"Suppose we calm down a bit," suggested Grove. "What's the matter?"

"Matter enough, in all conscience!" answered the man. "I just got the *Gazette* out on the street, and this was the first thing I saw. Listen to this:

"NEW YORK BROKER INSOLVENT.

"Franklin F. Conant fails to meet creditors. Believed to be in Worcester. Liabilities near a hundred thousand. Accused of stock juggling.

"How's that?" yelled the man as he finished the head-lines and again flourished the paper in Grove's face. "Wha' d'yer know about it, anyway, young man?"

"Mr. Conant," answered Grove slowly, "has—er—has just stepped out."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN FROM NEW YORK.

ARTHUR GROVE, with no desire to evade the tempest, but wishing to begin investigations for himself, closed the office as soon as he had pacified, temporarily, the alarmed and indignant investor, and went home to the Chatham Street boarding-house.

Mr. Marcellus Aiken, however, was there before him, armed with the fateful copy of the *Gazette,* and prepared to do battle for his rights and the cause of justice.

"The treasurer of the company must know all about it, if any one does!" declared Mrs. Bixby, as she and Aiken confronted Grove in the lower hall.

"The so-called treasurer of the company intends to find out all that he can," Grove replied. "Unhappily, I have been kept in the dark, and the cheerful confidence everybody had in Mr. Conant has aided him in keeping me in the dark. I want information as much as any of you do."

"Praise God, there are laws to reach such people!" said Mrs. Bixby fervently. "You knew all about my money, Mr. Grove!" she went on rapidly, her voice mounting the scale toward shrill treble. "You knew that I put in all that I had

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in the world—into your miserable swindle. You knew that I was a poor, hard-working woman, with no one to advise me or protect me. You have polite manners and a smooth way of talking, and you make folks think that butter won't melt in your mouth.

"You—you, with all your talk about not wanting money — about money not making any one happy. I guess that's the way folks talk that are sneaking around after other folks' money — that's what I guess! And—an' I took you in, Mr. Grove, when you didn't have a red cent. I don't blame Mr. Denzil so much, neither; I know him too well to think he'd be mixed up with anything he thought was bad.

"But you come along, an' right away after that comes Mr. Conant, with the comp'ny, ready to make everybody rich. It don't look right—I leave it to Mr. Aiken or anybody — and we're goin' to have it looked into. If we can't get our money back—an' Lord knows that's hard enough on a poor woman!—we'll have justice; we'll have the law on you scalawags that ain't got any mercy on poor, hard-working women, poor widows, an' all that! We're goin' to—"

"My dear Mrs. Bixby," exclaimed Grove anxiously, "please take breath and calm yourself a little! You'll be ill, and—"

"Give the madam a chance to speak," Aiken broke in gallantly. "You've had your turn at talkin', you and your pals! You'll have to hear what other people have to say now!"

Grove laughed involuntarily.

"Look a' that!" exclaimed Aiken. "He's hardened to it. It takes an old hand at such games not to have his heart touched a little at other people's troubles."

"I beg your pardon for laughing," said Grove soberly. "I was thinking of the one occasion on which I did attempt to talk; it was when I begged this good lady—"

"Don't speak of me so patronizin'!" objected Mrs. Bixby.

"When I begged her to think before she invested her money so freely," persisted Grove. "She suspected me, then, of not wishing her to have a fair chance. I have tried to talk on other occasions to Mr. Conant and Mr. Denzil, but you have interfered—both of you."

"Hear the man!" cried Aiken. "We've interfered!"

"By joining others in handing your proxies to Mr. Conant," explained Grove quickly. "Your proxies have held all the meetings, with Mr. Conant using them like cards in a game of solitaire."

"Smooth! Smooth!" chirped Aiken. "He'll tell us all about it, Mrs. Bixby, and have us thinking we're really the ones to blame, before we're through."

A low, quavering voice sounded from the stairs, just above the group.

"I think most of the blame, most of the disgrace, rests on me," said Pamela Irwin, coming slowly down. "I'm sure I never dreamed that such frightful things could happen—I can scarcely believe it now—but none of you would have known my uncle but for me. I know that Mr. Grove never knew him before. I don't know now what has happened; I can't think that my uncle will allow anything to happen to your money."

"Your uncle has blown our money—that's what he's done!" declared Aiken. "He got in wrong in New York, and came up here to bunco us out of enough to help him out. That's the way with these shysters! He's been speculating with our money. If he'd had luck and things had broke right for 'im, then it might have worked out better; but he got his bluff called too quick."

The cold brutality of the man's tone silenced the girl, and she began to cry softly.

"If I hadn't put all that money into stock," she said presently, "I would make my uncle use it to pay you back. He had no right to give it to me if he was in such straits himself."

"You have your stock certificates, Miss Irwin?" Grove asked gently.

She nodded, giving him a glance of vague appeal and perplexity.

"I have them all," she said. "I have the new lot—fifty thousand dollars' worth. Mr. Denzil brought it to me this morning."

"I beg you not to give them up until

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you have talked with me about it," urged Grove. "Keep them carefully, and wait for further developments."

"Yes, you keep 'em!" exclaimed Aiken sarcastically. "That's valuable stock. It's printed on fine paper, and paper's 'way up—war prices. Maybe a junkman will give you a nickel for the lot, Miss Irwin."

Grove ignored the man.

"Please hold it, Miss Irwin," he repeated, "no matter what happens. It may save a lot of trouble."

"For Mr. Arthur Grove," added Aiken scathingly. "There's just one man that he's out to save trouble for, believe me! I don't know what the clever little game is, but you may just as well hold on to the stock, Miss Irwin, and hold on to it extra hard when he's around."

Grove turned on the man angrily, but checked himself as he was about to make a heated retort, and strode out of the place.

The afternoon passed with sporadic indignation meetings in various parts of the house. Pamela Irwin, so nervously unstrung that she had not attempted to go to her office in the State Mutual Building, braved the storm of innuendo, suspicion, and open abuse, tearfully assuring the clamoring inquisitors that she was ready to do everything in her power to right whatever wrong had been done them.

At dinner-time appetites were impaired, and the meal resolved itself into another mass meeting. Those boarders who had previously disclaimed any interest in the company now confessed to secret investments made with Conant or Denzil. Hartley Wilson, the dapper young photographer bewailed the apparent loss of eight-five good dollars, the slender capital which he had been hoarding for some mysterious esthetic future.

At nine o'clock, to the astonishment of the boarders, Messrs. Conant and Denzil walked rather meekly into the house.

Denzil, of the two, was the more self-possessed and defiant, and he held himself as a man surprised and shocked by the recent events. Conant was suave and ingratiating, but could scarcely conceal a certain furtiveness, as of a man prepared to dodge a sudden blow.

Denvil checked a sudden onslaught of inquisitors in the parlor and gained the floor for himself.

"I know just what you all have to say," he announced belligerently, "and you may as well save yourself the breath. I have been managing the Conant Investment Company, and I'm still managing it. I shall be responsible for everything to my last penny—if that 'll do any good. I don't know where we stand yet, but I'm going to find out. I hear that Grove has been talking, and I want to say that he had no right to talk. I'll do all the talking that's necessary, and stand the consequences."

"Well, you'll have to do a whole lot, right here and now, Mr. Denzil!" declared Marcellus Aiken, stepping forth as the champion of the weak.

Denzil glared at him savagely.

"That 'll be all from you!" he cried harshly. "I'll talk as much or as little as I please. As for you, you'll do no talking, even if I have to shut your mouth for you."

One of the elderly women screamed in sudden fright.

"Denzil! My dear Denzil!" exclaimed Conant deprecatingly. "I beg of you, don't precipitate any fresh difficulty. These people fancy that they have a grievance, and it is no time for violence or unnecessary ill feeling. There is much to be explained, and—"

"If you can explain things," broke in Denzil, with a bitterness that amazed the hearers, "I want to hear you just as much as the rest. I'm the goat now, and if there's any way out of the mess, I want to be shown."

"My friends," began Conant, becoming characteristically oratorical, "this is really a large tempest in a very small teapot! Now please be calm and reasonable. Such things are not unusual in the business world. In the fluctuations of the markets, a man may be squeezed to the wall any day. But you have seen financial giants broken and crushed, apparently, and you will recollect what followed: they came back.

"I am not one of the towering giants," he continued, smiling modestly at the ad-

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mission, "but I am not a man to be broken or crushed. I shall go to New York directly, and adjust the little matters that have brought about this crisis. In a few days, comparatively, the squall will blow over, my credit will be restored, and you will find the Conant Investment Company going forward with a vim and snap that it has not yet attained. We have made certain mistakes in organization, and we shall correct them. A certain person that we placed in a position of trust has disappointed us; he has betrayed his trust, as it were, and—"

There was an interruption from the doorway. Arthur Grove had entered the house unperceived, and he stood on the threshold, partially concealing a stranger who accompanied him.

"In deference to good taste, Mr. Conant," said Grove, "I must let you know that I am here, before you direct any more of your rhetoric toward me."

"I would speak as plainly in your presence as I would behind your back," asserted Conant courageously. "But," he added in an altered tone, "I see that you have a man with you. Perhaps you have invited the newspapermen to take part in our conference. If that's the case, I shall certainly refuse to go on."

"I am not a newspaperman," said the stranger, stepping forward. "I am one of the stockholders in this company; and if this is actually a meeting of stockholders I have a right to be here. My name is Wells Haverford."

Conant grew suddenly red, and he stammered before he could speak intelligibly.

"M-M-M-Mr. Haverford," he said awkwardly, "I am pleased indeed to meet you. We're having a little heavy weather, as it were, with our new enterprise, and I've no doubt you've heard something about it. Now, with a man of your judgment and ability on hand, we shall straighten the affair out with no trouble at all."

"I came up from New York," said Haverford quietly, "to see what was happening here. I happened to find this—er—Mr. Grove, I believe, at your offices, and he informed me that I might find Mr. Denzil here."

Marcellus Aiken's reawakened spirits forced expression.

"Now we'll have something done, and done right!" he declared. "I've heard a few things about Mr. Haverford. He ain't in the same class with Mr. Conant; he's a real financier, more like Morgan!"

"You flatter me, sir," said Haverford, with a dry smile. "I have not a large investment in this company," he went on briskly, "so I shall certainly not give much time to an investigation. I just ran up here, in fact, to look things over, and I shall decide quickly if it is a case for legal investigation."

"No, no, no!" protested Conant fearfully. "My dear Mr. Haverford, that would be useless, and it would ruin everything."

"It all depends on how I am able to arrange matters," said Haverford coldly. "I have already been over the books with Mr. Grove. I am willing to acquire control of the company, and develop it on a reasonable basis."

Conant frowned and shook his head doubtfully, while Denzil looked vaguely perplexed.

"Miss Irwin has a lot of the stock, I understand," continued Haverford, "and I am prepared to buy it from her at par."

Conant gasped, and brightened perceptibly.

"I might sell out to you on those terms," he said quickly.

"That's real talk!" exclaimed Aiken at the same time. "You can have all my stock, Mr. Haverford, this very minute, at that price."

Immediately there was a rush to sell on the part of all the boarders, and the Chatham Street parlor became a miniature stock exchange. Wells Haverford took over all the small holdings on the spot, and wrote checks for the purchases. When he gave Miss Irwin a check for fifty thousand dollars, the performance was witnessed by a gaping audience.

"And now," said Conant, standing aloof with some dignity, "do you care to take over all my stock, Mr. Haverford?"

"None at present, thank you," was the staggering reply. "Your standing is some-

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what impaired, Mr. Conant, and I should have to see your New York creditors about the disposition of such property."

Conant paled, and his eyes flashed angrily, but he shut his lips tightly and controlled himself.

"I don't know that I care to sell," spoke up Denzil. "If we are to carry the company on under your control, Mr. Haverford, it looks more hopeful. However, I should like to see Mr. Grove sell out his small lot and withdraw from the organization."

Haverford smiled and looked at Denzil with some amusement.

"I now have a controlling interest, you see," he replied, "and I shall reorganize the management at once. I have decided to make Mr. Grove the manager of the company."

CHAPTER X.

LIKE ALL THE OTHERS.

"WHAT shall I do with fifty thousand dollars?"

The question and the tone in which it was uttered formed an epitome of hopeless, helpless bewilderment, and Pamela Irwin's face told the story of a sleepless night and a mind overburdened.

Arthur Grove stood with her in the parlor into which she had called him after leaving the breakfast-table.

"It's a question that has never been answered satisfactorily for any one by any one," he answered. "Whatever is done with fifty thousand dollars is sure to be wrong, and the source of much regret. That's the penalty for having fifty thousand dollars."

"I don't feel like jesting about it, really," she said with a troubled frown.

"I'm sorry; I hardly meant to be humorous," he apologized. "But to me there is something positively funny about fifty thousand dollars, and grimly tragic at the same time. You have about one chance in a thousand of being comparatively happy with it; the nine hundred and ninety-nine other chances run the whole gamut of disappointment, wo, and madness. Seriously, I fancy that the best advice would be *Hamlet's* to *Ophelia:* 'Get thee to a nunnery, and quickly, too.' The only safe course would be to bury your fifty thousand, then flee to your nunnery, lest it burrow out and pursue you."

She shook her head and smiled sadly.

"You won't be serious, you see," she said reprovingly. "My uncle offered his advice last night, and—"

"Save the mark!" exclaimed Grove. "I beg your pardon, Miss Irwin, for that," he added hastily; "but if I pretended that I thought Mr. Conant an honest man, you would instantly detect my hypocrisy. It would be better and kinder for me to keep silent."

"You must know how I feel toward him after what has happened," she said bitterly. "No ties of relationship could make me defend him or condone his actions. I was going to say that he urged me to give him the check and let him invest it in six per cent bonds for me in New York. I told him that the whole great amount should be used to restore the losses that his creditors had suffered through him.

"I took the money last night from Mr. Haverford in order to pay back the money my uncle got out of these silly people in the house; then Mr. Haverford made that impossible for me by paying them himself. I urged my uncle, for a moment, to take it and reimburse his creditors in New York; but when I discovered how greedily ready he was to accept that offer, I knew he would not play fair, and I— Well, you see, I kept the money. He went away in a towering temper. He said he would come back this morning to reason with me."

"I'll tell you what to do," said Grove earnestly; "and this is serious. Get your fortune under cover at once. Take your check to a bank and deposit it as quietly as possible. Then let it rest there until you can see things more clearly. If Haverford could afford to pay you so much for stock that was almost worthless, that is his affair. If he puts the company on its feet and makes money, your conscience may be easy.

"On the other hand, if you see that this stock jobbing and juggling has permanent-

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ly ruined the business, and that certain persons will lose heavily as a result, I know that you will insist on distributing your money to right your uncle's wrongs. Your sense of honor, I believe, is in inverse ratio to that of your uncle."

"That, I suppose, is the only thing to do now," she agreed. "Will you guard me and the check from here to the State Mutual Building, Mr. Grove?"

"Of course," he answered. "A check would be of little use to robbers, but in these times a lady worth fifty thousand must be guarded. As soon as your good fortune—so to speak—is known, there will be men hastening to sell you Newton Hill, Lake Quinsigamond, and the village of Greendale. If you go out after dark, they'll have the Bancroft search-light on you."

"But it's not an enormous fortune," she protested.

"No; but it's a lot of spending money to be placed in a woman's hands all at once," he explained.

They left the house presently and walked down the hill to Main Street. At a point nearly opposite Franklin, it was whimsically arranged by fate that they should meet Conant and Denzil.

The two men were evidently headed for the boarding-house, and while they still tolerated each other's society, strife and discord between them were quite apparent.

"My dear Pamela," cried the older man, "I was just going to you. I wonder, now, if you've seen the miserable things about your unfortunate uncle in the morning paper?"

Pamela shook her head.

Conant produced a copy of the *Telegram* and pointed with a trembling finger to an item prominently displayed, and Grove and the girl read the opening lines:

> Franklin F. Conant, of New York, and known not wisely but too well in Worcester, is evidently *persona non grata* in both places. From the big town on the Hudson River come rumors of his intensive farming in many kinds of shady enterprises, and there are hints of indictment by the grand jury.

Without reading more, Pamela turned away with a gesture of bitter disgust.

"It has shaken my nerve; I am a broken man this morning," said Conant plaintively. "I feel humble and penitent—though God knows that I am the victim of the sharp practises of others. Most of all, Pamela, I am thinking of what your dear mother would say if she were alive. I was her favorite brother, you know, and she expected great things of me."

"Pardon me," broke in Grove, "but we shall attract unwelcome attention if we stand here long."

"That's it!" cried Conant; "I am even a person to be shunned. But I must talk to some one before I lose my wits. Can't we go over there under the trees on the Common? We can talk quietly there, and there are few people passing."

Grove's face showed disapproval, but the girl consented, and the four crossed the street and walked slowly around and back of the City Hall, Denzil lagging slightly, vastly ill at ease.

"You are the only person in the world, my dear, that I can look to for help," Conant said boldly. "I don't care for money, now; I can live without the miserable stuff; but I want to silence these barking dogs; I want to redeem my good name. After that, I don't care what happens to me."

The girl maintained her cold reserve, but seemed touched in spite of herself.

"I still have my first purchase of stock in the company," she said, "besides—all the money. How could you settle your affairs, Uncle Franklin? How much would you require?"

The man's eyes grew slightly keener and his voice sounded less feeble and pathetic.

"You could realize about sixty thousand in all," he said brazenly. "I think that would do it; it would just about clear me."

"All of the money!" she exclaimed, astonished at his assurance.

"I'm sorry, dear child," he said sorrowfully; "but really, you know, it came from me, didn't it?"

"No!" said Denzil sharply; "I don't believe that it did. You have had no money that you could honestly call your own. As for this fortune that—er—Miss Irwin has just received, it was practically out of the pocket of Wells Haverford. Why

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he was so willing to hand over such a big bunch, I don't know—nor care very much! But the stock certainly never cost you much, Conant, and Miss Irwin has her luck to thank more than you."

"Your interference was not invited, Mr. Denzil," retorted Conant with asperity. "I am capable of conducting my own affairs, and I am dealing with my niece; you are not concerned in any way."

"I'm concerning myself about it just the same," retorted Denzil. "You're Pamela's uncle, but that's her bad luck. All the more reason that somebody's got to keep an eye on you, and watch out for her interests. As for me, I happen to be in love with the lady, and I haven't given up hope of making her my wife. That's why I'm sticking right on the job."

He had raised his voice to such a degree that Pamela looked anxiously around, fearing that attention would be drawn to the group.

"To call you tactless and inconsiderate would be treating the case too delicately," said Grove quietly, turning on Denzil; "you are insufferable, and I won't allow this absurd scene to go on.

"I think we should continue our walk, Miss Irwin," he said to the girl, taking her arm. "I will arrange to talk with these two men again in a more secluded place."

Denzil flushed darkly and caught Grove as he turned away.

"Hold on, there, Grove!" he ordered peremptorily. "I have an eye on you, too. Is all this sudden devotion of yours aimed at the fifty thousand bucks, or at the lady? That's what I want to know! You're a pretty poor slob to trust a lady with, anyway, and it don't look good to me."

"We shall have to talk together at another time, Denzil," replied Grove coldly. "I shall look you up and have a definite understanding. Now you'll have to step aside, or Miss Irwin will be embarrassed by a scene still more outrageous."

"Please don't continue this, Mr. Denzil," said Pamela, pathetically appealing. "I know Mr. Grove is a good friend to me, and I trust him. If you and my uncle have any consideration for me, you will say nothing more."

Denzil raised his hat, with a show of ironical gallantry.

"That settles it for the time being, sure!" he exclaimed. "You have a few things to learn, Miss Irwin, and I hope the lessons won't be too expensive. All right; I'll see Mr. Grove later.

"Come on, Conant," he said curtly, taking the older man's arm; "I haven't got through talking to you yet."

He led Conant away forcibly, with the latter protesting indignantly and making vain efforts to disengage himself.

Grove quickly led Pamela across the Common to Front Street.

"I think," she said nervously, "that we will go back to the house. I am too excited and upset to transact any business this morning. I really must go home."

"It may be as well," Grove agreed. "I certainly will not offer you any more advice until you recover from this outrageous affair. The check, of course, is safe enough. If it were lost it would be a white elephant on any one's hands. It couldn't be cashed, and the New York bank would be notified at once of the loss. So don't worry about it. We'll go home, and you must rest for a while."

He guided her across Main Street and up Pleasant, walking slowly and allowing her to be quiet.

They were past Chestnut Street when she spoke again.

"I'm sorry I have caused you so much trouble, Mr. Grove," she said. "You have always been ready to help me, but it seems to mean a lot of trouble and ill-feeling for you, now, and it worries me."

"Please don't add that to your troubles," he responded. "As a matter of fact, I find it no great hardship. If I were not so concerned for your peace of mind I think I should enjoy the new turn of affairs. It's rather novel for me, you see, to be mixing in such matters. I have been so much a spectator that's it's rather stimulating to be taking an active part.

"No matter what happens, or what I am able to do to help you," he added, growing unwontedly serious, "I am more than repaid. You have so much cause to be suspicious and distrustful of men, Miss Irwin,

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that I was genuinely amazed to hear you say that you trusted me as a friend. It was, I think, one of the few great, triumphant moments of my life."

The girl looked at him, half startled, and could not conceal her embarrassment at his words.

"You have never done anything to shake my good opinion of you, Mr. Grove," she said, in a rather labored manner. "You are always so tactful and well bred, so considerate and unselfish, that you inspire confidence."

"I think that I would rather hear that from you than from any other person on earth!" he exclaimed, and there was a note of deep feeling in his voice which caused her to look at him again, puzzled and disquieted.

"Why—thank you," she said falteringly; "I'm glad—I'm glad that you value my good opinion, Mr. Grove."

"I live very much with myself," he went on, in a grave, subdued tone, "and I rarely allow myself the luxury of emotions, but I have discovered that I admire and respect you, Miss Irwin, above all the women I have ever known. I don't want to add another worry to your list, but it is fair and right that you should know— Oh! I have to tell you—that I love you."

She stopped short and looked at him, with pain and something like horror in her eyes.

"Oh, I'm—I'm sorry!" she gasped. "I'm sorry you said that. It would have been so much better if you hadn't said it."

Grove was surprised and puzzled.

"It had to be said," he answered gravely. "I am sorry that you take it in this way—sorry for myself, and sorry that I have hurt you. But I am too dense, too short-sighted to know why you feel so badly about it."

"I should think you could see," she sighed, shaking her head wearily. "Don't you see that it puts you—after all my confidence in you—it puts you among the other men. You have always treated me so respectfully, with such kind courtesy—but with nothing more. And now—when I have this horrible fifty thousand dollars—you suddenly declare that you love me. You might at least have been a cleverer actor, Mr. Grove!"

CHAPTER XI.

SHIFTING WINDS.

GROVE went reluctantly to his office in the afternoon to confer with Wells Haverford on the new policy of the company, and in his mood of black depression he felt little interest in the enterprise. Haverford, a man of many activities, wished to return to New York that evening, and the afternoon was spent in a rush of rapid-fire plans and snapshot decisions.

Grove went home, with lagging steps and in deeper gloom. He found Denzil at the house, and, to the latter's surprise, invited him into his room.

"I suppose the big talk is to be pulled off now," said Denzil, as he sat down.

"No, I am not ready for 'the big talk,'" Grove replied wearily; "I am too tired to think. But I have a message for you, and I'm glad I found you here. Wells Haverford is at the office, and he wants to see you before he returns to New York. He will wait there until you arrive, or until he hears from me."

"What's wrong?" demanded Denzil suspiciously.

"I believe he intends to offer you a larger salary to return to your position of manager," said Grove.

"That 'll do!" Denzil exclaimed. "This is no time for kidding!"

"I'm giving you his message," said Grove. "I have withdrawn from the organization. Mr. Haverford and I could not agree on certain points. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Mr. Haverford did not care for some of my ideas; so I made his course easier for him by withdrawing. He thinks that he can arrive at a practical understanding with you, and that you have many qualifications for the position."

"I'll believe all this when I hear it from Haverford!" declared the other, deeply puzzled. "Didn't it do any good for you to tell him that I was a rough neck and a bad all-round proposition?"

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"I am not in a mood to quarrel with you," Grove returned. "No, I had to agree with him that your experience with this company fitted you for the position. I was quite willing to break with the business, and it would have done me no good to give him my personal views of your character. He feels that you will be a more reliable man with the influence of Franklin Conant removed."

"I'll be less like a murderer, with the influence of Franklin Conant removed!" Denzil muttered disgustedly. "Well, you've got me guessin', Grove, and I don't know what to say to you. If you're not stringing me, I suppose I ought to be much obliged to you. At the same time, if all you say is true, you must be a softer kind of a boob than I thought you were. I can't quite pat a feller on the back for layin' down on a job and handing it over to somebody he don't like."

"Haven't you learned during all the troubles that you have been having," said Grove reflectively, "that no man can spare time or energy to concern himself about other men's affairs? You would do very well, Denzil, to consider a few changes in your personal code. You will have to learn to let others alone and give all your attention to yourself."

"I reckon," said Denzil, "that if you were going to murder a feller, you'd hold him up and give him a lecture first."

"I believe you profited by one or two of my lectures," returned Grove, "and after that you kept your own counsel and ran into trouble. You undoubtedly have the money-making faculty, Denzil, but you kill yourself with arrogance and high-handed egotism. You can make money, and still have time to acquire some decency and self-control. When you can handle money without eating, breathing, and sleeping money, you will begin to be a success."

Denzil got up and moved toward the door.

"Much obliged, I'm sure," he said, with grudging politeness. "Much obliged for the lecture, and for the tip—if it's a live one. I'll hustle down there now, and see what Haverford really wants to get hold of me for."

Grove went to his former employer, Ratcliffe, in the Slater Building, next morning, and applied for his old position. Ratcliffe was affable and talkative, but hardly friendly.

"How are the mighty fallen!" he exclaimed. "Your career as the Conant people's treasurer was rather short, wasn't it, Mr. Grove? Well, I'm afraid you're only a ten-dollar-a-week man, as I thought at first, and I need bigger men. Sorry I can't find another place for you."

The applicant went away disheartened, and after trying for an opening in two other offices in vain, he trudged home.

Pamela Irwin and Conant were sitting in the parlor, and the girl asked Grove to join them.

"You may be interested to hear what I have to tell my uncle," she said coldly. "I had an interview with Mr. Wells Haverford this morning, and after that I sent for uncle to come here.

"I have done what my conscience tells me is best," she went on solemnly. "I have decided to use the fifty thousand dollars in paying some of my uncle's creditors, for the sake of the good name of our family."

"Noble girl!" exclaimed Conant, with deep feeling. "I felt, somehow, that you would come to that. It will be the proudest moment of my life, my dear, when I go to those people who have slandered me to tell them that I am getting on my feet again. I shall leave for New York on the first train."

"It will be scarcely necessary," said Pamela. "You see, I have placed the money in Mr. Haverford's hands, and he will manage the whole affair. He will employ a lawyer to meet your creditors and satisfy them as far as the money will go."

Conant was leaning back in his chair, speechless and pale with consternation.

"You—you gave—all that money—to Haverford!" he panted, after a long silence. "Great Heavens, what an insult to me! Pamela, you must get it back at once. I am able to settle my own affairs, and I will not be treated like an irresponsible person!"

"You are one," replied the girl unfeelingly, "and that is why you must be treated as one. The arrangements are com-

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pleted, and I think Mr. Haverford has gone to New York already. If I gave you the money it would never reach one of your creditors; you would fling it into the first wild speculation you could find, and that would be the end of it."

"It's a crime!" declared the excited man. "Fifty thousand dollars! A precious lot of good I'll get out of it!"

"Then you have the effrontery to admit that you were lying to me when you begged me to help you pay your creditors and save your good name!" cried the girl contemptuously. "Is there any depth of treachery and dishonesty to which you will not stoop?"

"With—with even a little money," Conant almost whimpered, "I could pull myself up. I can make money as well as I ever could. My creditors can wait till I'm able to pay them, can't they? They'll be glad to get anything at all."

Grove looked at the man with pitying contempt, but took no part in the conversation.

Pamela started forward suddenly, her eyes flashing with a new anger.

"Tell me, how and why did you ever give me that present of ten thousand dollars?" she demanded. "It is not the first time I have wondered about it; but now that I see how utterly selfish you are, I can't believe that you ever did such a thing of your own will. Why, you were on the verge of insolvency, it seems, when you made me the gift! You needed money then; you were planning new swindles and crimes at that very time."

Conant's eyes gleamed craftily, and he appeared to consider carefully.

"You would not do a thing to help me—your uncle, your mother's favorite brother," he muttered. "You treat me like a dog; you have no regard for my feelings. Well, then, I'll have no regard for yours. I hope you'll be pleased to hear that the ten thousand was given to you—in charity! A person very much interested in you — with what motives I do not know—commissioned me to give you that money, that you might not have to work for a living. I was induced to pose as the benefactor on account of our relationship, and you got the cash."

Pamela's eyes grew round with wonder and horror.

"I think you are lying," she said slowly, "yet I can believe almost anything now. But go on; perhaps it will humiliate me still more to hear who the person was that did such an extraordinary thing."

"As a man of honor, I cannot divulge the name," answered Conant.

The girl laughed harshly, and Arthur Grove smiled involuntarily.

"I gave my word never to reveal the person's identity without permission," continued Conant, unabashed, "and I shall not."

"It was not—it couldn't have been my father's aunt, in Georgia?" faltered Pamela, groping helplessly for a clue, and becoming vaguely frightened.

"No, my dear, the person was not a relative," said Conant teasingly. Then, with a smile for which Grove came near to striking him, he added: "A pretty girl inspires charity and should not despise it. I can tell you just this, my dear niece: the person was a man—a very wealthy man, and obviously much interested in you."

Pamela sank weakly into a chair and covered her burning face with her hands.

"If you have done enough, now, you had better go," said Grove sternly.

"You shall tell me this!" Pamela cried, starting up with renewed anger: "I can't think it possible, but—was it Denzil? Did he dare—"

"If you'll allow me to say it, I feel sure that it was not Denzil," said Grove gently. "I knew much of his affairs at that time, and he made other use of the ten thousand dollars that he earned as a commission just before that. Denzil and I are not on the best of terms, but I will say that I do not think he would have presumed to such an extent, under the circumstances."

"I have nothing to say; neither yes nor no!" declared Conant airily. "If Denzil had done it, it would have been magnificent, and I can't conceive of a sane girl being angry at such a thing."

"Naturally, you couldn't understand anything like that," remarked Grove. "But I must ask you to leave the house, Mr. Conant. I take it upon myself to do that."

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"It is not hard to tear myself away from such gloomy company," returned the older man. "Very well, I'm off."

He smiled again at the girl, but she turned away from him, and as Grove made a peremptory gesture, unmistakably threatening, he walked out of the house with what nonchalance he could command.

"I have something to do, now," said Pamela hoarsely. "I believe I can get money for the stock I bought originally, can't I?"

"I think that Mr. Haverford will be willing to buy it from you," answered Grove.

"I must see about it at once," she said, half to herself. "Then I have to find out who the man was! I shall pay it back to him, with interest. It was a loan; I must think of it as that. A very shameful favor thrust upon me by some one who did not respect me."

CHAPTER XII.

AN ARMISTICE.

WHEN Denzil came in at night, Grove went to his room, spoke to him with cold reserve, and told him of the scene in the parlor.

"He's a dirty old hound, isn't he?" Denzil exclaimed. "Well, I'm much obliged to you for standing up for me. You know, of course, that I didn't do the trick. Great Scott! if I was going to give any one ten thousand dollars I'd make some noise about it. I never heard of such a queer case. Well, I reckon she'll hear more about it before long, unless the feller was just a plain nut. If it 'll do any good, I'll give her my affidavit that I wasn't the lunatic."

"As you please," and Grove turned to leave the room.

"Oh, I may as well tell you that I took the position back," Denzil said uncomfortably. "Haverford and I had a long talk, and we understand each other pretty well now, I guess. I appreciate what you—oh, the way you acted about it, you know. It was pretty white of you."

"Not at all," said Grove, with a gesture of protest. "If I have a difference with a man, I do not go about seeking to knife him."

"Well, I'm sorry we had any run-in," muttered Denzil, dropping his eyes and fidgeting uneasily. "That confounded old shyster got my goat so bad that I clean lost my head. I suppose, when everything's considered, you acted all right. I guess I was too cocky to live, but I thought I was getting away with it all. I wanted to put that poor mutt where he belonged and settle everything my own way.

"Good Lord! I wouldn't have treated any girl mean, if I thought about it; but he started the thing, and I was crazy mad because—oh, because she threw me down too hard. I tell you straight, I thought the girl was a blamed fool to throw down a man like me. Well, it was something like a sunstroke, I reckon, and I'm all over it now."

Grove listened quietly, but softened a little as the other finished his confession.

"That sounds more like the man I met on the Spencer road, begging a light for his cigarette," he said. "I could forgive a great deal just for the first few days I knew you. I haven't forgot that you 'staked me,' and I remember many good things. You almost convinced me that you could be happy and contented with money, but I'm not so sure of that now. You've had some rather wonderful success, in a few short weeks, but I wonder if you're as happy now as you were when I met you."

"No!" answered Denzil emphatically. "I've had more misery in the last month than in all the rest of the time I've lived.

"But I'm going to fix all that," he added, a moment later. "I'm going to keep on making money, and I'm going to be happy. I'm learning all the time. You've got to do something besides think of money; ain't that so? Don't laugh—but I'm going to begin going to church. I'm going around to the art museums, an' all that. I partly promised a feller that I'd join the National Guard. I went down to the armory on Grove Street the other night, and I think I'm going to enlist in the artillery—'B Battery,' they call it."

"You needn't tell me these things apologetically," Grove said kindly. "I think

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that a man should feel a proper interest in all matters of that sort."

"That's the idea!" exclaimed the other, waxing enthusiasm. "I believe it takes a lot of time and hard work to belong to this militia business, but—it's the duty of a citizen. That sounds like I read it out of a book, but that's the way I'm beginning to feel. Say, why don't you do something like that? You might come down to the armory with me to-night and see what they do. You have to be a private first — unless you've got some kind of a pull and know about military things—but I'm going in to do the work, and I reckon I'll get to be an officer when it's my turn."

"It's a good thing," said Grove earnestly. "Yes, I'll go to the armory with you; but I don't think I shall enlist. I have to make new plans, Denzil. I am out of an occupation, and growing restless. I think I shall be moving on presently. I've seen Worcester, and approved it, but Worcester and I may part company with no deep regret on either side. As a bystander—an observer—I have to look for new scenes, and the country is big."

Denzil stared at him with a melancholy frown.

"You're a queer one!" he exclaimed, with a really friendly smile. "You're too deep for me; I can't make you out. If I knew half as much as you do, I'd go to Congress, or run a newspaper; I'd make some noise in the world. I found out from Haverford that he didn't really fire you; it was all your own doing. He said he couldn't understand you any more than I could.

"But I wish you'd stay here," he went on earnestly. "I'd be only too glad to give you a job back in the office. If you're so blamed afraid of pulling too much salary, I'll let you name it yourself. I'll come down to five dollars a week, if that 'll be any comfort to you."

"That would be nearer what I'm worth," laughed Grove. "But I think I shall pull stakes, Denzil. There has been a deal of discord, and it changes everything, you know."

"Is it the girl?" asked Denzil bluntly, but without intentional offense. "Has she been upsetting you, too?"

Grove frowned, but controlled his feelings.

"Why, maybe she has—through my own fault," he admitted.

"She's a queer girl," asserted Denzil.

"A wonderful girl!" Grove declared; "but sensitive and high strung."

The other man nodded slowly.

"I guess that's it," he said. "Yes, she's a wonderful girl, all right."

When they parted for the night, there was no handshake or pledge of renewed friendship; but Grove was satisfied with the other's behavior. In his own way, Denzil had made a handsome apology, and their friendship was begun again upon a firmer foundation than before.

Three days later Pamela Irwin told Grove casually that she had been in correspondence with Wells Haverford, and that he was willing to pay her ten thousand dollars for the rest of her stock.

"I shall put it in the bank directly," she said, "and then do all I can to solve the mystery. Something will happen, surely, to throw some light on it."

"I wonder if you feel more at ease, now that you are poor again—or practically so," said Grove, with no suggestion of humor.

She considered solemnly, with characteristic honesty.

"I don't think so," she told him. "That's something of a triumph for you, isn't it? It proves your contention that money is the cause of all trouble; yet one case, or a hundred, cannot prove a theory absolutely. Of course I've been desperately miserable since this money mystery began, and I'm glad that one phase of it is over. But now, you see, I can't deny that I am disappointed. I was so glad to have a little money, when I thought that it was all right, and I had begun to make some simple, pleasant plans for myself. I began to see some of the advantages of having a comfortable fortune. Now I have to forget those dreams, and go on working for my daily bread."

"Forgive me for worrying you," said Grove suddenly, "but I can't help asking the question. Do you still think that I made a certain declaration on the inspiration of your wealth?"

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She dropped her eyes and seemed hurt, but gave an honest answer, as usual.

"I have stopped thinking about it," she said, "for it isn't pleasant. How am I to know? How could I ever know?"

"I am without a position, now," Grove said gently, "and without immediate prospects; but if I could earn a fair salary—a reasonable competence—and I should beg you to marry me, what would your answer be then? I assume, of course, that the ten thousand is no longer yours."

"Isn't this rather cruel of you?" she demanded, in a choking voice. "Oh, I'll answer you, of course. I should refuse you, Mr. Grove, and I think I should understand such a proposal. You are a gentleman, with many fine principles and instincts, and I believe that you are quixotic enough to ask me to marry you, merely to redeem yourself."

"I wonder if I should take that as a tribute," murmured the man. "But if I could prove to you, in any way," he persisted, "that I had no desire for your money—assuming that I could offer you tangible proof—"

"That is too hypothetical," she interrupted, with stern finality. "You disappointed me terribly, Mr. Grove, and if I was wrong—if I misjudged you—how am I ever to know it?"

"Possibly by trying to know me better," he answered hopefully.

"That is rather vague and problematical, isn't it?" she said. "I fear that I'm a very difficult person. I get impressions, and they stay with me forever. However, Mr. Grove, I hope that we shall be good friends. I suppose that a gentleman cannot be blamed too much for seeking an advantageous marriage."

"Please spare me that," protested the man. "Let us not discuss it any more."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE SHADOWS.

DENZIL came home one evening and greeted Grove jubilantly, as he found him sitting alone on the piazza, deep in thought.

"The market broke just a little better than all right for me to-day," he announced; "I cleaned up an even thousand."

Grove smiled and raised his brows.

"Why this moderation?" he inquired. "I thought you habitually figured in tens of thousands."

"I'm getting wise, old man," chuckled the other. "I'm not galloping any more; just riding easy. Safety first! A thousand dollars is more than I thought it was. If you try for whales all the time, you're goin' to get pulled out of the boat and drowned; it's better to come home with your boat full of little fish: they'll weigh as much as the whale altogether."

"How's the military life?" inquired Grove.

"I've enlisted," Denzil answered proudly. "I'm waiting for my uniform, now, and pretty soon I'll be doing hay-foot-straw-foot all around that armory. They say a rookie gets it put all over him for a while, but I reckon I'll be able to stand it. I liked the looks of the fellers I saw round there; and Cap'n Herbert sized up right; he's the boss of the outfit."

"If poor old Carranza keeps up his little game of tag, you may find yourself a real fighting man," said Grove.

"I guess that's right," Denzil agreed. "And say! I've let myself in for it, so it's all right; but wouldn't it play hob with my business? I don't know who Haverford could get to take over the office, and—whisper!—I've got a little bunch of money working for me with a New York broker that would probably lose itself if I took a few days off. I had a hot tip from Haverford, and I played it. It has been a long time breaking, and I've had to feed it some. Now, if I was stuck down there in Mexico somewhere, there'd be no one to feed the canary."

"Such are the fortunes of war," observed Grove.

"Say!" Denzil whispered suddenly, "I've been squinting over there by those trees where it's so dark, and there's a man standing there, sure. I saw him move a little just then."

Grove looked in the direction indicated, but was not particularly interested.

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"It is probably a Mexican spy who has heard of your enlistment," he suggested.

"Well, if he stays there much longer, I'm going to see about it," said Denzil.

A moment later Pamela came out of the house and walked up Chatham Street. She had been noticeably nervous and restless since the matter of the anonymous gift, and she went for a solitary stroll almost every evening.

A growing constraint between her and the two men made them diffident about offering to accompany her, but they were equally disturbed at the thought of letting her go forth alone.

"By heck!" Denzil gasped suddenly, "that feller in the dark over there is gone; he has followed her."

"Did you see him go?" cried Grove, starting up.

"No, but he was there when she came out, and now he isn't. Those trees aren't big enough to hide him altogether."

Grove darted into the house and caught up his hat and Denzil's from the hall-stand.

"Come on," he said tensely, "we'll not be far behind them, if there's anything wrong."

Walking quietly and in silence, the two men reached the corner of Crown Street in time to see Pamela passing over the rising ground toward Pleasant, and in the half light they glimpsed a man walking nearly abreast of her on the other side of the street.

They followed at a slightly faster pace, and trailed the two pedestrians through Pleasant and West Streets, to Elm. At every corner the mysterious man crossed the street furtively, avoiding the bright light from the arc lamps, and kept pace with the girl, who seemed not to have discovered him.

Pamela followed the north side of Elm Street at a brisk walk, and did not stop till she came to Park Avenue. She turned north then, and strolled along the border of Elm Park, and the unknown crossed the avenue and was almost lost in the shadows at the base of Newton Hill.

Grove and Denzil hurried forward, now, fearful of losing the trail in the shadows of the park, and they saw the girl turn into one of the main paths traversing the latter diagonally toward Highland Street.

Grove gave Denzil a sudden shove into a clump of bushes, and they concealed themselves just in time to escape the notice of the man who now crossed the avenue hastily and almost ran into the park.

"We're off again!" whispered Denzil, springing out of the thicket and making after the fellow, with Grove at his heels.

"Did you get a look at him?" asked Grove softly, as they trotted lightly along the turf beside the path. "Can you guess who it is?"

"It's that Conant dog, or I'll never guess again!" Denzil panted.

It was dark in the intervals between the park lights, and as they heard faint sounds of footsteps ahead of them, they slowed to a walk, not only to avoid coming suddenly upon the persons they were trailing, but to escape the possible active curiosity of sundry worshipers of the mystic night, who sat in pairs upon secluded benches.

All at once they nearly stumbled upon the approach to a narrow bridge that spanned the shimmering lagoon, and Grove caught his companion's arm roughly and flung him back into the heavier shadow.

He had heard footfalls on the bridge, and as he and Denzil waited, scarcely breathing, a voice sounded above them, on the top of the bridge.

"I've got to have money," they heard distinctly—a characteristic utterance in the familiar tones of Franklin F. Conant.

"Dip into your ten thousand for just five hundred," he went on, "and I swear I'll tell you the name of the man. I won't ask you for any more, and you can have the peculiar pleasure of returning the balance to your admirer."

"Let go my arm and leave me here, or I shall scream!" threatened Pamela.

"Will you do it for me?" demanded the uncle.

"You know that I can't," she replied. "I have no money; the ten thousand in the bank is not mine. I am holding it until the owner claims it and relieves me of a hateful responsibility. I haven't faith in a single statement of yours, either. You would give me any name that came to your mind."

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"I am not so hard," returned Conant virtuously. "I will take your word freely. Promise me five hundred, and I'll tell you the man's name now. You may take time to verify it before you pay me."

"You are wasting breath," Pamela informed him.

"You sha'n't leave me until we come to an understanding!" declared the uncle, suddenly adopting an air of menace.

Without consulting Denzil, Arthur Grove strode out of the concealing shadow, and was at the top of the bridge in three bounds.

The girl started nervously and gave a low cry. Conant whirled about and shrank against the railing.

"You come with me, Conant!" Grove ordered sternly; "I want a talk with you. Mr. Denzil will take you home, Miss Irwin," he added to the girl, and made no excuses for the interference.

Conant rallied his courage and began to mumble objections, but Grove hustled him roughly off the bridge, and marched him away toward the Agricultural Street corner of the park.

Pamela was unnerved and almost sobbing, and Denzil gently guided her homeward.

"I wonder," she said despairingly, "how it will end! A creature like that will haunt one all through life. He is taking up blackmail, now, you see, and he will stop at no possible trickery."

"I wish he was about twenty years younger, I'd know what to do!" Denzil declared boyishly.

"Violence is useless," she returned. "There is nothing that can be done. There is no scandal or publicity that he would not thrive on, while I could never endure such things."

"See here, Pamela!" Denzil exclaimed impulsively, "why don't you look the whole state of affairs straight in the face? It ain't right for you to be fighting it out all by yourself. Ain't any woman better off if she's married to a man that's crazy about her?"

"Oh, please don't!" she gasped. "You know—"

"I know that no living man would try harder to make you happy," he declared. "I've changed a whole lot; I'm improving. I'm goin' to get polished and veneered, an' all that, till I'm a real gentleman like Arthur Grove, with money enough to back me up. I'm all through pestering you and wanting to get married right away, but I want you to think it over and see if you can't get used to me. Gee! I'll wait ten years for you, if you say so!"

His earnest manner touched her, and she spoke more kindly.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Denzil," she said gently. "Really, you'll be much happier if you'll forget all about me. There are so many nice girls, that you'll like a great deal better than you like me."

"Try that on the horse marines!" he replied, with some asperity.

"It's true," she insisted. "You need a wife that you will not have to beg for. You and I could never be thoroughly congenial. I don't want to be unkind, but you know that you will always be more or less rough-and-ready; you haven't the natural tastes of the men that I find congenial. I don't reproach you for that, but you must see how utterly unsuited to each other we are. I don't despise wealth, but it would be a secondary consideration if I really cared for a man. If you were worth a million, Mr. Denzil, I couldn't feel otherwise toward you."

Denzil bowed his head, and they were drawing near the house on Chatham Street before another word was spoken by either.

"I guess I ought to know when I've got mine!" he said at last, and his shoulders drooped dejectedly. "I've talked to myself about it, and swore I'd never give up, an' all that—but what's the use! You read about roughnecks that make good and show the girl that they're worth caring about, but I guess it ain't that way in regular cases. I've got a book up-stairs that says a feller can get anything he starts out for. What do they let poor nuts like that write books for?"

She put her hand on his arm as they stopped at the house.

"Please don't be unhappy," she said. "You'll laugh about this, and about me, as soon as you meet the girl that's waiting for

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you. Keep on with your work, Mr. Denzil, and show people what you can do."

"I suppose I'll keep on, all right," he muttered; "but what's the use? Money! That's all I'm good for—to make money. Arthur Grove is a wise guy: he's got it right! I've kidded myself along about money getting a feller anything he wants, and it don't do it!"

CHAPTER XIV.

CALLED TO THE COLORS.

IT was after one o'clock that night when Grove returned to the house and knocked at Denzil's door. He found him sitting up, smoking, his face dark with the woes of the world.

"Well, what did you do with that yellow mutt?" Denzil inquired. "I'd 'a' tied a brick to his neck and dropped him in the park pond."

"I did all that I could think of doing under the circumstances," was the answer. "I put him on the train for New York, and I got him to say that he wouldn't come back. That meant, I suppose, that he wouldn't come back for a week or two. He vowed that he was shaking the dust of Worcester from his feet for all time, but I'm not celebrating the triumph—it's too doubtful."

"Express train! First stop: Springfield. Well, he can't get back here before morning, anyway," Denzil muttered skeptically. "How is Miss Irwin? Was she badly frightened?"

"Yes, I reckon she was," Denzil answered dully. "She's all right now, though, I guess; perfectly all right, Arthur; and—an' I'm perfectly all wrong!"

Grove saw in a flash what had happened. He frowned with momentary disapproval, but the misery in Denzil's face forced him to relent. He went over to him and rested a hand on his shoulder.

"It's tough, isn't it?" he said. "It's something we can't get over right away; we have to suffer till the pain wears itself out. Well, 'man proposes, and God—' rebukes him and shows him how utterly helpless and futile he is."

He took a turn about the room, offering Denzil a chance to unburden his mind, but the other remained tragically silent, so Grove bade him a friendly good-night and went to his own room.

On the following day Denzil grieved the devoted and admiring Mrs. Bixby by giving a week's notice. He was taking quarters in a hotel near his office, he said, in order to have greater seclusion.

"I'm leaving on June 17," he told Grove, at the breakfast table, and Grove expressed regret, but nodded understandingly. He, too, would be leaving as soon as he could make definite plans, he mentioned casually.

Denzil went away on Saturday, as he had planned. He was visibly melancholy and he avoided the formality of good-byes by leaving a few books and the like to call for the next day, explaining that he should be often at the house to keep up old friendships.

On Sunday night Arthur Grove sat on the piazza with Pamela Irwin, and they agreed the Denzil's departure had brought an atmosphere of lonesomeness upon the place.

"Being one of the unemployed, my purse is growing thin," said Grove, "and my plans will be made for me if I don't give attention to them soon. I think I shall be breaking camp and getting on the march again in a few days."

"I shall miss you very much," said Pamela, in a low voice; "I shall be—very sorry to have you go."

"I shall come back—some time—once in a while," he said gravely. "That is, I shall come wherever you are. You see, I permit myself to hope that time will do something for me. After you have thought of everything—if you will do me the honor to include me in such thoughts—you may gather some new impressions out of the tangle. Some day you may have a thought that I was a victim of peculiar circumstances; that because I spoke impulsively, at the one worst moment of all others, I was made to suffer for my indiscretion."

"I don't know," she replied slowly. "Sometimes I think that I don't understand myself. I can't give you any en-

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couragement, Mr. Grove, but—I shall always be very glad to see you."

Denzil came upon them then, walking with a jaunty air that was pathetically easy to stamp as affected.

"Back to the old home!" he cried, as he came up the steps. "I ran up to get some more of my things, and to speak to some real human beings."

At Pamela's kindly invitation he sat down, and they chatted with rather less restraint than usual.

"How does it seem to be a luxurious hotel-fed bachelor?" Grove inquired.

"Rotten, thank you!" was the reply. "They certainly have good grub down there, but it seems like I've got harder to please all at once. I reckon it's because I'm paying real money that I get a grouch right away if a bellhop don't scamper when I push the button. What am I going to do, anyhow? If prosperity is going to make me a crab, what's to be done? You ought to know, Grove; you're the philosopher."

"If I knew," said Grove, "I would declare myself at once, and take rank with Plato and Confucius and Immanuel Kant, and all the noble company."

"I guess that a little wealth is bad for a feller," suggested Denzil. "I've got enough money now just to make me hard to please and peevish. If I had more—a lot more—I'd be more independent. I'd keep busy, then, chasing around in a steam-yacht and visiting my chain of country estates."

"The obsession still persists, you see," chuckled Grove. "Well, I dare say there are some rich men who are comparatively contented.

"I knew a man," he continued, settling himself in his chair, as one beginning a narrative, "who was rich as the most ambitious person could wish to be."

"You knew him!" Denzil exclaimed facetiously. "Gee! if I knew a guy like that I'd fasten onto him."

"I used the term broadly," explained Grove; "I was not intimate with the man, as you may guess. He was a man after my own heart, Denzil. He had a steam-yacht as big as a liner; he drove blue-ribbon horses from the box of his tally-ho; he whirled through Europe in his motor, stopping to dine with princes or to shoot pheasants with grand dukes. When he raised his hand, factories and whole cities moved or stood still; his smile, or a glance from his eye, was reported on the stock exchange. When he entered a club, generals and Senators stood up to bow to him. His handshake could establish an unknown person in society.

"Well, Denzil, this man was more discontented and unhappy than you are. He found himself dreading another day, praying for some relief from his worries, envying every man in the street."

"What was the matter with the boob?" demanded Denzil. "Why didn't he buy Russia and China, and have something to take up his time?"

"It was just this," answered Grove. "He was perishing of boredom. Don't you see? He had nothing to breathe but air; nothing to eat but food; there was nothing for him to wear but clothes; he couldn't walk anywhere but on the earth; he could hear nothing but sounds, see nothing but sights, dream nothing but dreams. There was nothing to live but life: his money could not buy anything more than that for him. Don't you see what a tragedy it was?"

"Awful! Terrible!" cried Denzil, feigning keen anguish. "What did that poor devil do? Don't tell me that he had to go right on living!"

"Being a gentleman, I suppose he had to," said Grove. "It's bad form to take one's own life, and there's no satisfactory alternative."

Mrs. Bixby appeared suddenly at the door of the house.

"There's a gen'leman wants Mr. Denzil on the phone," she announced. "He's been tryin' to get 'im at the hotel, an' he wants to talk to 'im right away."

Denzil hurried into the hall, and his part of the ensuing dialogue was heard by those on the piazza:

"Hello! Hello! Who? What's that? Who? Don't know the name. Oh, I get you, now! Hello, Corporal; what's the good word?"

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There was a moment's pause, then he grew excited.

"What!" he yelled. "Turn over; you've got a nightmare! To-morrow morning at nine? Quit your kiddin'! Say, I've got an office to go to, you know. Don't make any difference? Is that so? All, right, old man; keep your hat on. I reckon I'll have to be there."

He came back to his friends in a frenzy of consternation.

"Whatcher know 'bout that!" he gasped. "Old man Carranza's kicked over the milk-pail, and Woody Wilson has ordered out the whole da — excuse me! — the whole grand old National Guard."

Grove sprang to his feet, surprising both Denzil and Pamela with his unwonted excitement.

"You don't say so!" he exclaimed. "Was that an order you got? Are they going to mobilize the Guard at once?"

"Quicker than that!" said Denzil. "Gee, but the beans are spilled this time! I have to be at that blamed armory, in my new uniform, all dolled up for a Mexican party, at nine o'clock in the morning."

Grove smiled slightly, but was evidently disturbed.

"Come, old man," he said, "you're not really so upset about it, are you? You didn't join the Guard just to play soldier and wear brass buttons, I'm sure."

"No, I'm going, all right," Denzil said more quietly. "But, Arthur, this thing is going to clean out my pile. You'll call me a fool, but I've been playing hard the last few days and standing to win a real pot of money. If I stayed around and watched the ticker, I might juggle things all right and keep the ball a rolling, but I've got to go'n live in a tent, some place they call Framingham. I'll be miles away from a ticker, and I ought to put up about five thousand dollars to cover myself. I haven't got anything like that, and I can see the whole blamed mess just scooped into the discard. *Good night!*"

"I'd keep calm about it this evening," counseled Grove. "In the morning you may find that the troops aren't leaving for several days."

"But there's no ticker in the armory!" groaned Denzil, "and we've got to stay there till we get to the city."

"Then maybe I can watch the ticker for you," suggested the other. "I'll tell you what we'll do: I'll come down to the armory in the morning and see how you look in your uniform; then we'll talk the thing over and find out what we can do about it. Perhaps Miss Irwin will take the morning off and come with me to see the brave array."

"Why, yes, I'll be glad to do that," said Pamela. "We must cheer Mr. Denzil when he marches off to fight the foe."

CHAPTER XV.

THE GOD IN THE MACHINE.

AS Grove and Pamela Irwin got off a street-car on Salisbury Street next morning, they found a martial-looking Denzil awaiting them at the door of the armory. His trim uniform and leggings set off a rather gallant figure, and there was a light in his eyes that belied his professed reluctance to leave business and march to battle.

"I'm ready for 'em," he announced gaily. "Villa's career is about over. I'm on my way."

"It isn't so bad, now that you're in harness, is it?" said Grove, as he and Pamela followed their guide into the bustling throng of potential warriors.

"It's all right, I guess," Denzil answered soberly. "We're to leave here to-morrow for the mobilization camp at Framingham, and stick there for a while. They say the grass is two feet high all over the place, and soaked with rain, but I reckon that won't be as bad as Mexico. The fellers turned out all right this morning, and Cap'n Herbert says we can go to our offices to-day and fix up our business.

"I don't know about the business," he added gravely; "I'm trying to forget it. I sent a wire to Wells Haverford, asking him to come up here on the next train. I want to see the office taken care of all right, even if my own business has to slide."

"I've been thinking it over, Denzil," said Grove, "and I've worked out a little

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solution of your problem. I think we can keep your money from losing itself."

"That sounds good to me. Will you come over to the office later?"

"I'm sorry; I can't do that," answered Grove. "I really came here to say good-by. I'm leaving for New York this morning."

Pamela uttered an involuntary cry.

"You're going away!" she gasped. "You didn't tell me."

"I wanted to tell you both, when we were together," said Grove.

"What's happened?" demanded Denzil, vastly mystified. "What's taking you away so suddenly?"

"The call to arms," was the astonishing answer.

"Gee! but you're always a queer one!" Denzil exclaimed. "You don't mean to say you're chasing off to New York to enlist!"

"No, not to enlist. It happens that I'm attached to the service, as you are, and I have to obey the order to mobilize."

"But when did you enlist?" persisted Denzil impatiently.

"I have never enlisted," said Grove, with a certain confusion. "You know that officers are commissioned, not enlisted."

"Officers!" roared Denzil. "Sacred cats! you an officer! Are you kiddin' me? What kind of an officer? What's your rank?"

Grove scarcely smiled, but grew more grave and confused.

"I have the rank of colonel in the New York National Guard," he said. "I am detailed as inspector-general on the division staff."

Denzil sat down suddenly, and clapped his hands to his head as though to hold it on.

"Say, Arthur Grove," he roared, "are you crazy with the heat, or am I? Can you tell me something about all this, before I faint?"

Grove looked furtively at Pamela, who met his glance coldly. She was pale, and her hands trembled perceptibly.

"I have a good deal to explain and to confess," he said slowly. "I told you a little story of a man I knew last night, but I didn't finish it. Mrs. Bixby interrupted me when she called you to the telephone. The end of the story was that the man grew so weary of the life that he had purchased, he resolved to break away from it and go in search of a life that must be earned with labor. He left his steam-yacht one night in a motor-boat, and landed on the Massachusetts coast. Then he set the boat adrift, and started on his pilgrimage without credentials and with a handful of change in his pocket. He shaved off the beard that he had worn for a long time, and was adequately disguised.

"When he learned from newspapers that his disappearance was causing a sensation, he got in communication with his private attorney and created the report that he had gone to Europe for an indefinite time. He had no intimate family ties, so there were no difficulties of that sort.

"He found the life of a tramp rather fascinating for a while, and he was marching aimlessly across the State when he fell in with a man that seemed desirable as a friend. The man, it developed later, had vast ambitions, with little prospect of pursuing them successfully, so the tramp decided to be 'the god in the machine,' and he drew on his New York resources, and created a future for the ambitious one and the foundation of a fortune."

Pamela continued to look at Grove, silent and cold. Denzil had risen to his feet, and stood wide-eyed, awe-stricken, speechless.

"Wha — what's your name — your real name?" he faltered, when he found his voice.

Grove silently handed him a bank-check which he took from his pocket.

"My name is on that," he said.

Denzil took the check in a trembling hand and stared at it dumbly for a long time.

"A. Spencer Strafford," he mumbled at last, and looked up at the other man in a sort of stupefaction. "A. Spencer Strafford!" he repeated. "Why, I read a piece in the *Telegram* about A. Spencer Strafford's disappearance on the very night Arthur Grove came to the boarding-house!"

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"Yes," the other assented. "I remember that very well."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Strafford," said Denzil in a respectfully formal way that vaguely hurt the other; "but — did you fix everything that we did? You know what I mean."

"On that first night," answered Strafford, "I wired my agents in New York to talk with Ratcliffe, the real-estate man, and secure you a position with him at a large salary. Ratcliffe was secretly instructed to help you in every possible way, and he was paid for all he did. Mr. Conant was also subsidized by my agents, and they directed his organization of the new company and everything that followed."

"And Wells Haverford—what about him?" asked Denzil.

"Wells Haverford is my confidential agent in New York," was the answer, "and he has really managed the whole affair."

"My God!" Denzil gasped and hung his head, overwhelmed by the magnitude of the disclosures.

He looked at the check again, and studied it as though it was difficult of comprehension.

"Twenty thousand dollars," he murmured abstractedly. "M-m! This is my name on the check here—Francis Denzil. What's that for?"

"That is to cover your stock speculations while you are away," explained Strafford simply. "I had to protect the fortune I had created for my own entertainment. You are welcome to that, Denzil; and I am still in your debt for many things."

"Twenty thousand dollars — just like that!" Denzil murmured. "I wonder, now, how much money a man has to have to be as careless with it as that. If it wouldn't be impertinent, Mr. Strafford, I'd like to know—"

"If it will relieve your mind," said Strafford kindly, "I'll tell you: I have still —after all our adventures, Denzil—somewhere between fifteen and twenty millions. And now, if you don't mind, I'd like to be forgiven for all my deception and conspiracy, and have you feel that nothing has come between us. If you have profited by our adventures, I have done more than that. I have had a taste of life; I have learned to eat and sleep and live without bankers and private secretaries at my elbow. I have learned almost how to be contented, for I've broken the spell and got used to standing on my own feet."

Denzil smiled suddenly, as though regaining consciousness.

"I'll begin to understand it a little in a month or so," he said; "but you can't expect me to be sane yet a while. You see, you're not Arthur Grove; he's gone. I'd like to get acquainted with you, Mr. Strafford, but it 'll take some time. I'd like to thank you, an' all that, but I don't know how."

"When this Mexican affair is over," Strafford said quietly, "won't you come to New York? We'll get acquainted all over again, and perhaps we'll have some adventures in finance that will be more exciting than those that are past. And then, you see, you can try out all the steam-yacht business, and that sort of thing, to make certain that you really want to be a millionaire.

"Good-by, Denzil," he added, holding out his hand. "Be a good soldier, and come back with a sword at your belt."

Denzil seized his hand and tried to speak, but he choked over the words. He shook his head, signifying his inability to say even good-by, and an instant later he turned abruptly and darted away, like a schoolboy overcome with confusion.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WEIGHT OF EVIDENCE.

PAMELA spoke for the first time as soon as the two were alone, and she was ominously calm.

"If you can spare the time, Mr. Strafford," she said, "I would like to go to the bank and hand you the money at once. Of course, I am right in assuming that it came from you?"

He bowed solemnly, looking at her with pathetic appeal.

"I am sorry it seems so outrageous to you," he said. "I suppose I went too far

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in my whim of being a magician. I heard you and Denzil give your respective opinions on the advantages of wealth, and I wanted to see the theories in practise. Your uncle was easy in our hands at first, and I didn't look for such developments in his character. That is the thing that I find it hardest to forgive myself for. But I have satisfied his demands and pacified him, I think."

They started out as they talked, and walked slowly toward Lincoln Square. Her dignity awed him as it never had before.

"It is humiliating," she said, "to learn that I have been used as a puppet. But I am willing to believe that you did it without realizing the harm it might involve. I shall feel relieved when I am rid of the money, and I think that your experiment cured me of all desire for wealth, Mr. Strafford, if that gives you any satisfaction."

"I can't say that it does," he replied, looking at her pointedly. "I don't want to embarrass you or annoy you, after all the pain you have felt this morning; but I am going away to-day, and I can't help asking—not in triumph, but for my own happiness — if you are glad to have the proof that I was not seeking a wealthy marriage."

Tears rushed to her eyes, and she stopped and turned away from him.

"Don't!" she begged. "I don't think it is kind to bring up that subject. I hoped that you would say good-by and go away without making me think of that again."

Strafford caught her hand and turned her toward him.

"If you think that I carried my play-acting to the point of romance," he said sternly, "you misjudge me more than I can permit. When I asked you to marry me, I had one ambition in life: to tell you who I was, and persuade you to come with me back to my own life, and teach me how to be a wealthy man and a happy one. I confess that I wanted to win your love in the guise of a poor man, but I wanted it, anyway, as I still want it."

They were passing over Court Hill, barely moving, and she suddenly reeled, half fainting, and sat down on the low stone coping of the grass plot.

"I think you'd better leave me here," she said hoarsely, after a moment. "I can't talk with you. I will send the money to you, and I don't think we shall meet again."

"That is an answer that I can't accept," he told her gently. "Of course, if I could, I should stay here in town to talk with you when you are calmer; but I am subject to the orders of the War Department as much as any man in the service, and I have received orders to report in New York to-day.

"Listen, Pamela," he went on, and took her hand again; "I am going wherever the troops are ordered to go. It may be to Mexico, to engage in actual warfare, or it may be merely to wait in camp until the flurry subsides. But if the worst should happen, if I should go and never come back, wouldn't you ask yourself if you had done right? Wouldn't it mean anything to you that you sent me away bitterly hurt, and with all my hopes of happiness blasted?"

She cried now without restraint, paying no heed to the possibility of attracting the notice of passers-by.

"I never could marry you," she said miserably. "I would as soon think of marrying a king. I am not a society woman; the whole idea is—is too outrageous!"

"You are too broad-minded to make such an assertion as that!" he declared sternly. "You are a girl of unusual character, and you have poise and dignity. Can you deceive yourself so much as to think that you will ruin my happiness—if not your own—by following the dictates of your overwrought imagination?

"You as much as told me once that you loved me before I shook your confidence, and must I act like a veritable *Don Quixote*, and cast away my fortune, in order to win you.

"Isn't it possible for two sensible people to love each other and be happy in spite of enormous wealth? Indeed, when I met you I began to see the way clear; the one way to be happy, though rich. Are

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you going to follow the example of the heroines of old English novels, and sacrifice your lover and possible happiness for a vain whim?"

She got up and started to walk again, drying her eyes with her handkerchief.

"I think I will take a car and go home," she murmured absently. "I wish you would let me go alone."

"You can't even answer me!" he said severely. Then, with his watch in his hand, he spoke firmly: "The train I have to take leaves the station in fifty minutes. Will you answer me?"

"I feel as though I were going mad," she said distractedly.

"You are fighting a losing fight and a foolish one," he returned mercilessly. "You know in your heart that you will marry me. Why should I go away alone to wait for your decision, and perhaps never see you again? You have only to be yourself once more to think clearly what is best for us both. In fifty minutes we can get the license and be married, and the train will bear us away on our wedding journey."

She stopped again and faced him, her eyes still brimming with tears and her lips trembling pathetically. Then, all at once, the mere shadow of a smile crossed her face.

"Should I have to meet all those icy society woman in New York?" she demanded.

He thereupon kissed her in full view of the respectable and easily scandalized promenaders of Worcester's principal thoroughfare.

"Here's a taxi!" he cried jubilantly. "Come! We've no more time than we really need."

(The End.)

MANHATTAN

A NARROW window underneath the eaves,
Where never touch of sunlight comes, nor moon
May shine to mix the magic of the night,
But where, across that little patch of sky,
Sometimes a white cloud smiles, or, in the dark
Between the chimney-tops, can gleam a star;
And there, night after night, one sits and stares.
Up from the depth below is heard the shout
Of children dancing in the street to some
Late organ's tune, the call of neighbor wives,
The laugh of passing women; and he sees
The arc's false moonlight lie along the wall.
The asphalt smell, hot, heavy, holds the air,
And comes the dull, recurrent sound of trains
Upon the pillared track. He, city-lured,
Has seen mirages pass; and it is still
A narrow window underneath the eaves,
Where, weary with vain quests, he sits and stares.
The odor of the town is now the breath
Of June across the fields of hay; the sound
Of voices, those who turn the windrow back;
And the commingled rumble of the trains,
The humming of innumerable bees.
Again it is sweet summer-time at home—
And oh, the orchard walk, the little lane, and she!

Eldredge Denison

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The Spirit of the Feud

by Marianne Gauss

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

MINDEL MEIGHTON was cleared of the charge of shooting Reme Sturtevant at Townley Bridge. But that by no means satisfied the Sturtevants. Courts could say what they pleased, but the Sturtevants *knew*—or thought they did.

And when Mindel Meighton defiantly returned to Blackwater after the trial for the secret purpose of marrying Julia O'Malley, whom he loved very deeply, the Sturtevants got busy, even more secretly, to prepare the way for hanging Mindel "as high as Haman" if needs be.

Mindel met Julia at Nine-Mile; and the Sturtevants met Mindel.

They almost hanged him, too, but for the intervention of Ally Spencer, who was an outlaw, and who told Mindel, prophetically, to beware of "guns." But Mindel, who thought he had been betrayed into the hands of the Sturtevants by Julia!—well, Mindel was in no mood to beware of anything. So he bought a gun, drank a lot of whisky, and went out on a deliberate hunt for Buck Sturtevant, who loved Julia and who Mindel thought, would surely get her if something did not happen.

Mindel did his best to make something happen. He put his gun slap up against Buck Sturtevant's head and pulled the trigger. And found himself in jail, wondering what had happened. Sheriff Hope told him in four succinct words:

"The gun wasn't loaded!"

Very sober now, Mindel was glad of that. And when the sheriff opened the back door of the jail for him and told him to catch a certain convenient train, Mindel didn't hesitate a whole lot. He caught the train, but left it again because the Sturtevants were waiting for him at the Crossing. So he was forced to try again at the junction.

With half an hour to wait, his nerves began to jangle.

Julia O'Malley's "treachery" had done things to Mindel he would never forget.

CHAPTER XII.

"BABE" WILL FIX IT.

ONCE more that uncanny yell echoed from the hills to the east of Nine-Mile. It was the shriek of the Kansas City train.

Meighton started to run back to the junction station. Breathless, he caught the train and pulled himself aboard. He dropped into a chair in a coach where sleepy passengers sat up and stared.

The train backed toward the Sturtevant farm. It stopped, hard by Sturtevant's corn-field.

"Will it stay here forever?" thought Meighton.

It started forward with a jerk, and soon gained speed on the road to Kansas City.

He was safe.

Taking from his pocket the letter he had written to Julia O'Malley—and which must now be mailed—his hand chanced on a package of pink ribbon in the same pocket. What should he do with this? He did not want it about him, anywhere.

Half-way down the aisle of the coach sat a negro woman accompanied by two half-grown daughters. Meighton approached her.

"Say, auntie, could you-all use a little scrap of ribbon?"

Before her admiring eyes he shook out the shining length, silvery, pink, like tea-

This story began in The Argosy for October.

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rose petals, falling in folds as a girdle does across a girl's breast. With unspeakable scorn he said:

"I ain't got no use for it. Take it!"

When he had rid himself of the ribbon and mailed the letter, it seemed to him he was now rid of Julia—until his hour for vengeance should come. But he felt restless and finally went into the smoker.

On the front seat there he saw Babe Sweet.

"I'm going up the road a piece-way, for the paper," Sweet told him. "About dark a call came from the sheriff, and the editor said for me to drive over and catch this train."

Meighton smiled. That call, he surmised, had been designed purely to get Hope out of Blackwater for twenty-four hours. He did not tell his friend this.

"And so you're going to Kansas City, Mindel, and do business with your uncle?"

"Well, I don't know about that right now, Babe. You see how it is: Sturtevants have a case against me, now—they might try to make trouble for me. I reckon after I've seen my folks I'll go off somewhere for a while and not leave an address."

Sweet edged near him in the seat.

"I reckoned you might be on this train, Ming. I know what-all happened. I didn't feel easy till I heard the train you got on at Blackwater had passed the Crossing and you wasn't on it. Did you walk clear over to the junction?"

Meighton detailed his experience.

"Let me tell you, Ming, how you could have saved yourself a heap of trouble: you ought to have given that li'l timber-rattler, Lanny O'Malley, a crack on the head, there in Blackwater, as you took the train—it was him sent word to the Crossing. You could have knocked him foolish without really harming him. Not that anybody ought to object to your killing him; but as he's listed in the census among humans, and ain't formally called a rattlesnake, it might have got you in trouble with the law. I don't see what made you let him go to do you a dirty trick."

Meighton made no answer.

"Well, Ming," Sweet resumed, "I reckon you're even with J— with the other O'Malley, without even tryin'." He glanced at the grim, white face of his friend.

"That so?" indifferently inquired Meighton.

"Yes. Old Man Sturtevant said his say yesterday, over in town. He allowed a man that killed a Sturtevant had to die, but he didn't want no person thinking he asked a woman to betray a man. You know his nephew Buck—you know he's been courting—her. Well, the old man says he ain't going to have his flesh and blood married to a snake. He says those O'Malley girls have lived around here and played their game too long. Everybody knows what they are."

Meighton flinched. He might have exclaimed—"Only Beulah is that!" But he held his peace. Julia was a hypocrite, a Judas; why should he defend her from the other charge.

Sweet continued:

"I reckon I could say what they'll do when the old man starts in. They'll wait on them O'Malley girls and politely tell 'em that Blackwater don't need 'em any more. They'd better move off somewhere."

There was a man once—long ago—greatly distressed to know "how a blow might fall such as falls on men," upon the woman who had betrayed him—and not prove too much for her womanhood." Meighton had not read much poetry, he did not know any one before himself had felt as he felt now. But to think of such a blow for Julia made him—sick.

"Oh, Babe," he exclaimed, "they oughtn't to do that."

"Why not? She's a—"

"Shut up. She's not—what you're going to say. I know."

Sweet paused a minute.

"Well, I reckon you would," he admitted.

"And say, you tell Old Man Sturtevant she's not that. He mustn't treat her like she was. I reckon I better tell you how it really was:

"You see, Babe, she turned against me—but it wasn't all her fault. You tell Old Man Sturtevant I'm to blame. Why, I fooled her. The real one, for me all the while, was a girl in Kansas City, and Julia

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found it out. It must have been that way. I didn't know she knew, but she'd never have treated me like she did if I hadn't been to blame. You be sure and fix it up with the old man."

"I sure will." Sweet grinned. Besides, he thought, he would take pains that Mindel's account of himself reached the ears of the O'Malley.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN FROM FORSTER'S.

IT was morning. Since about midnight, when it had been clicked off the telegraph instrument at the junction—while Meighton watched the red and green lights and listened to the erratic tick of the instrument—a message to intercept one Mindel Meighton had been in the hands of Kansas City detectives.

Meighton did not suspect that; it was by chance that he slipped off the train at the brick yard, walked over to the end of the yellow car-line, and, about ten o'clock, neared the apartment house where his uncle lived.

The streets had a holiday air, for it was Carnival Day. Most of the shops were closed, and here and there a young man or a girl bobbed out of a house in carnival costume, parti-colored red and yellow, with streaks of red grease paint on the face and usually around the baggy sleeve, holding it to the arm, a cotton ribbon with the name of some club or school.

But the flat was being tidied as usual. The door was opened to Meighton by Alice, in a pretty sweeping cap and ruffled apron. As her eyes fell on him, rejoiced that he had returned alone, she cried:

"Oh, Mindel, you've come home to stay with us."

"Well, Alice, I don't know, right now." For a moment he looked absorbed into her face. She was pink and white as a daisy, with a tiny red mouth and curls. "I'm afraid I'll have to go out West, right away."

"It's too bad you can't be contented here at all. You can't like us much, Mindel."

With these words her meek bosom heaved under the ruffled white apron. Her little mouth quivered like an infant's. The brown eyes—which never changed, even if she wept—were wide open. In a moment, he knew, a tear would roll out of each of them.

He tried to comfort her.

"But I do care, Alice, I'd lots rather stay. You don't know how hard it is for me to make up my mind to go away and leave you."

Alice looked at him in surprise. Something had happened to change him. This was the tone of a lover, and he had never before used a loverlike tone with her. Instead of weeping, she smiled.

It suddenly occurred to Meighton that he need not leave her—she would marry him to-night if he said the word. He had a couple of hundred dollars—enough to take them West and keep them till he could find work. Besides, Alice had money in her own right. Would she be willing to run away and hide with him? Ought he to let her do it?

He looked into her eager face. It would be right, he thought.

Then he must tell her all that had been happening to him in Blackwater. He opened his lips to speak.

Would he tell her about Julia, also? He winced, and was silent.

Alice had seated herself on the arm of a large chair. Smiling at him, whisking her duster around the carved legs of the chair, she looked wonderfully pretty. She was the kind of girl to marry—domestic, gentle—.

He walked over and sat down in the chair.

That he was near, that he was looking at her and perhaps thinking her pretty, that she and not some other girl filled his mind, was joy to Alice. A delicate pink came into her cheeks.

Without looking at him, she went on whisking her duster around the legs of the chair. The brown eyes, in their rather shallow sockets, were veiled—instead of by mists and shadows, like Julia's—with curtains of long lashes, curled at the ends, thick and silky as parlor portières. A veil

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like that is easy to penetrate. Her lover would always understand Alice perfectly.

But it would be hard to make her grasp anything unless one were painfully definite. Meighton decided not to tell her about Julia; he would just explain the difficulty he had had with the Sturtevants, say that he had to go West and ask her to be his wife. He felt he could honestly add that he loved her.

He looked down, she looked up. That meek devotion felt like a lotion to his wounded spirit.

"Yes," he assured himself, "I really am in love with Alice. Quite in love."

And just as soon as he had taken Alice in his arms—he felt sure—the bond which held him to that other woman—mysterious, hateful bond—would break of itself.

But on a stand were some tea-roses another admirer had sent Alice. Their odor stole over Meighton—the same fresh, elusive perfume given by the rose with which Julia had played two days before. She had always a rose somewhere about her—always a scent of roses!

A rose could not really belong to Alice. The front of her frock was drenched with lily-of-the-valley perfume. He hated lily-of-the-valley essence—so he turned his head away. For a moment he sat still, looking across the roses, across the room, to where a curtain swayed at an open window. The sun was hot on the concrete pavement, far below. Rasping noises of the city came faintly up into the room.

He would not be a woman's fool. No woman should hold him after she had lied to him. He turned resolutely to Alice; lifted his hand to lay it on the short, plump hand, with the boneless fingers, that rested on the arm of the chair. Julia's hand was slight and restless—butterfly fingers, that brushed one's cheek.

He could not take Alice's. But he would take her into his arms now, and tell her—

No; it was such a little while since he had held that other girl in his arms, her rose bruised on his breast, and her laughing mouth, as he bent to take the kiss he thought was his—

She had kissed him! That cheek could feel it yet.

And just now he could not bear the touch of another. He moved a little farther from Alice.

In some ways Alice was not dull of comprehension. She saw he was thinking of some other girl now; and knew it must be the same girl who had always stood, an unseen, powerful presence between her and Mindel. The brown eyes ceased to be very meek, indeed, had a kind of futile flash, made by blinking them very rapidly.

"Where did you go last week, Mindel Meighton?" abruptly asked Alice.

"Back where I used to live—Blackwater."

"I suppose"—petulantly—"you saw all your old friends, and your girl."

"I've got no girl in Blackwater." To himself he added bitterly, "or anywhere else." For he began to fear he could not marry Alice.

"Yes, you have a girl in Blackwater, Mindel. What makes you try to fool me about it?"

He did not answer Alice.

In a mirror over the mantel she saw her own face. Nobody could deny that it was pretty—why, then, did it not please him? The brown eyes filled, impatiently.

"You're in love with some girl at Blackwater!" she accused, and slid from the arm of his chair.

Meighton rose and stood a while in silence at the window. He could see the center of the street, but the sidewalk directly below the window was out of range. Only the triangular shadow of a man who was quietly waiting for some one to come out, was projected across the curbing. In his emotion, Meighton did not notice the shadow—though he saw it plainly.

He looked at little Alice. She loved him, she would have gone to the end of the world with him. She would have stayed by him all his life. And yet he was leaving her in tears—and for the sake of a woman not worthy to touch her fingers! He could have made this little creature happy! He was a brute.

"Alice," he began.

Little Alice was tying her ribbon apron-string. She had bent her head to hide the large dew-drops on her eyelashes.

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"Alice," he repeated.

Then the door opened and his uncle entered from the hall of the apartment house.

"Well, Mindel—come back to go to work?"

"I'll talk that over with you by and by." Meighton stood by the table where the roses were. He turned as if to escape from them. But something made him bend over the vase and draw in their odor, thirstily.

If she had been before him now, abject, begging for mercy from him, would he have taken revenge on her? Or would he have taken her in his arms and covered her eyes and lips with kisses?

Hating her all the while—hating her!"

He glanced about the room. It looked rather dark to his eyes, and Alice had slipped away.

His uncle's voice broke on his emotions.

"Well, Mindel, you haven't been breaking the law, have you?"

"What do you mean?"

"There's a detective down here on the ground floor, shadowing the place. You know, in a big apartment like this—"

His jocular tone changed at sight of his nephew's startled face.

"You don't mean to tell me, Mindel—"

"Where did you see the detective?" asked Mindel.

"As I came in, he was standing between the staircase and the entrance to the elevator, watching both."

Meighton looked from the window. The triangular shadow was gone from the sun-scorched asphalt.

"I think he stood outside for a while. I was a fool, I might have got out through the janitor's quarters, then."

"Mindel Meighton! You mean—"

"I mean I reckon I'm the man he wants. Is he a city detective?"

"No, I think he's one of Forster's men."

"Then Sturtevants have hired him to shadow me. But if he gets to shadowing me, it's all up. I can't shake him, and he'll hand me over to the city authorities."

"But see here, Mindel, the law won't hold you—you're cleared, boy."

"Yes, Sturtevants can have me fetched back to Blackwater. I drew a gun on one of 'em yesterday."

"You fool!"

"They'll have me charged with assault to kill. But last night they tried to lynch me—that's why they want me sent back to Blackwater."

As the two men looked at each other, the face of the older went gray. Mindel's hardened, and that play came in his greenish eyes, which was like the forked tongue of a snake. He resumed:

"They may have trailed me through a woman at Blackwater. She wants me hung—she's going with Buck Sturtevant now."

"Mindel Meighton, you ain't got mixed up in that O'Malley crowd!"

"Never mind. How will I get out of here? Where are the fire-escapes?"

"All in the back of the house, and watched—you can be sure. You can't work such a racket as that on a city detective."

"I know I can't. I'd like to see that spotter down-stairs."

Meighton crept down the staircase, to where the Forster man stood watching the elevator and the end of the stairs like mouse-holes. The roar of the city came in from the street—punctuated with the elfish laughter of carnival times.

A sense of helplessness came over him. If he had been in the woods around Blackwater he could have foiled this man. But here he was off his own ground and the detective was at home.

Meighton watched the city-bred face, bright-eyed, sophisticated. He could never match his wits against those! As he realized he was in a trap, a sudden rage came over him against the detective. He knew how it is that some men shoot when trapped.

It was with a kind of horror that he felt in him the urge of the Meighton killing streak. He was, as Allen Spencer had said, that kind when he was down. For an instant the spirit to fight went out of him, and he stole back to the flat.

"Mindel," said his uncle, "you left a gun here. Do you want it any more or shall I—"

"Take it. Do anything you want to with it. I've quit carrying a gun."

"You don't think you might bluff that fellow—"

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"No! And you know I couldn't."

Several boys in carnival dress approached the flat, and Andrew Meighton ran in, leaving his mates on the sidewalk. There was a commotion in the apartment house. Doors opened. Women ran to their doors, to look and laugh. Only one man in the house was unperturbed. Silent, with a little cynical smile on his lips, the Forster man stayed by his job.

Mindel Meighton's uncle returned from looking over the banisters.

"There's nothing matches those fellows for stubbornness," he muttered, "except a Missouri mule."

The boy from Blackwater drew a quick breath. Oh, to be back in the country of mules and razor-backs! Where there were haystacks to hide in, and dim woods every recess in which was known to him and Ally Spencer!

He spoke slowly, almost panic-stricken by the city.

"If I manage to shake this guy downstairs, how'll I get out of town? Don't you see? The Blackwater sheriff's office will have the city police notified to hold me—and maybe a reward offered. And this guy Sturtevants have hired will keep me in sight—"

"Why, Mindel, I thought Hope down at Blackwater was such a good friend of yours."

"So he is. He wouldn't bring me back if he could get out of it. But I happen to know Hope was tolled out of Blackwater for to-day; Plum Davis is in charge there—and he sticks with the Sturtevant crowd. The police may be here any minute to search your flat."

"Here's Andrew," said the older Meighton.

Mindel's cousin Andrew was perhaps ten years his junior, but of similar height and build—a trifle slenderer.

"Andrew, come into the bedroom here." When the older Meighton had closed the door. "You give Mindel your carnival clothes. You had some of that grease paint left. Now, be quick."

"Oh, gee—" the boy began.

"You didn't see the detective downstairs."

"Oh, say, he's a Forster man, ain't he? But gee, he don't know Ming by sight. He—"

"Every detective in Kansas City knows me by sight since I was tried here. Don't you fool yourself." Meighton was rapidly donning the carnival costume. "I don't think I'll get by with this," he remarked, as he streaked his face with grease paint.

The music of the coming parade was very close. Two or three boys of Andrew's crowd ran through the upper hall, calling him.

Mindel Meighton went out of Andrew's room and closed the door behind him. They welcomed him with whoops of delight—his disguise must be almost perfect.

But he was afraid to look toward that quiet, little man who watched the elevator and the staircase.

He edged into the middle of the group of boys, throwing an arm around the shoulder of each of two others. They were all talking together, in falsetto voices. Some girls ran out of an apartment on the first floor and showered them with confetti.

The Forster man scanned each member of the group, but his eyes returned to Mindel Meighton. There was something suggestive of the country in Mindel's walk—and his knees looked as men's do who have spent much time horseback.

A fine eye for detail might have found in the flourish of his arms something to suggest the successful driver and handler of the Missouri mule. Probably the detective knew little about mules. It was enough, for his purpose, to know men—city crooks and country bums, duped farmhands and sharpers playing countrymen, all of whom could be studied at the detective agencies.

The boys in carnival clothes ran laughing at the girls, the pink and blue confetti thick on their clothing and on the hemp matting of the corridor. When the girls had got into their apartment and locked its door, the carnival parade had reached the street outside.

The street was black with bobbing heads. Through the band music, Meighton heard the throb of a drum. "Like a cock partridge," he thought—and his mind went

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back to the long-grass meadows and the dim woods around Blackwater.

Wherever you see partridges you may look for dewberries. He had gathered a water-bucket of dewberries once, with Julia O'Malley to help him, very early in the morning in a wet, wet field on a shoulder of the mountain overlooking Nine-Mile.

They had driven out to the meadow in a big wagon with a team of mules—and the mules had run away, as mules do, for sheer meanness. They ran after Julia had climbed into the wagon for the return home—while Meighton was fetching the dewberries.

Meighton would never forget the moments while he held their heads, after he caught them, and they plunged, dragging him with them, toward the creek. When he had got them stopped, and held out his arms to her, from the ground, she was laughing.

He felt homesick for Blackwater now, in spite of all it had done for him. Well, he had shaken that spotter, anyhow. With Andrew's friends, he had stepped into the street—now he would lose himself as quickly as possible in the carnival crowd.

"Gee, Andrew," said a boy, in his ear, "what's that fellow in the brown clothes after? Looks to me like he was shadowing us."

Meighton turned his head. Right at his elbow, as noiseless and watchful as the weasels are in Blackwater, stood the fellow in brown clothes.

It was the Forster man who stood so long in the apartment house, watching the stairs.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MISSOURI MULE.

MEIGHTON dived into the crowd.

The priests of misrule were going by on their white horses, in red-and-gold robes. In a gilded car, driven by a boy dressed as *Puck,* sat the queen, the girl who had been voted the most beautiful in Missouri.

Meighton ran up to the car, waved his hand to the queen, and dived directly through the parade train, almost under the wheels. A policeman threatened him with a club. There was a little confusion.

When he looked up, he found he had lost his boy companions; but at his elbow was the shadow in brown clothes.

The moisture came out on his face.

One thing was in his favor. The Forster man hated the city police—besides, he wanted the whole reward of which the Sturtevants had notified him by wire. It was safe to say he would not ask any police officer he met to make the arrest. He would wait for some member of his own agency, who had a commission.

Meighton had learned during his former imprisonment the one weak point in the system—the feuds of detectives. It was an incalculable thing, as the mule is in the Ozarks.

In and out of the crowd he writhed, like the long, black snakes of his native creek-banks. But he never lost his brown shadow.

At last the parade approached the corner of a quiet street. At the curbing there stood a large, green wagon from the country. On the spring seat, high in air, sat a woman with a baby at her breast, and beside her a child of three, its legs sticking straight out, in red stockings and shiny shoes. The woman, the baby, and the child were dressed from the same bolt of pink calico. The man of the household had stepped into a saloon.

As Meighton approached, in the front end of the parade, the team—an enormous pair of mules, almost black—were beginning to plunge and make a certain mulish sound which Meighton understood better than words.

They were of course not in the least frightened; they were not afraid of anything. But a mule must have some reason for running away, and band music furnishes the best of excuses. The mules looked at the spectators as much as to say, "Who can blame us?"

There was a policeman at no great distance, but he did not know the mules were preparing to run. Mindel Meighton knew; he forgot the city, forgot even the Forster man—and leaped for the heads of those mules.

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They had counted on city handling. When they felt the hand of the Blackwater boy on their bridles they stopped, trembling as mules do when checked in a malicious purpose. The woman in the wagon began screaming and trying to get out—and a policeman rode up on a bicycle to help her.

"They're afraid of those carnival clothes!" yelled a bystander.

Meighton knew they were not in the least afraid of his clothes—only of his grip on their heads.

"See how they're trembling!" cried a woman.

The Forster man was not going to lose sight of the young fellow holding the mules. He left the sidewalk.

He was somewhat acquainted with horses, but did not know on which side to approach a mule. He walked up to the one Meighton had selected as the ringleader and all but laid his hand on the quivering brown side.

There was a crash and splintering of wood—that was the wagon-bed. The policeman swung the last occupant from the wagon. The owner of the mules rushed from the bar. Bystanders screamed.

Horses in the parade reared and plunged, and policemen rushed to restrain them. The ranks scattered to let pass an enormous team of mules, with Mindel Meighton clinging by their heads.

On the sidewalk, close to the place from which he had approached the mules, lay a small man in brown clothes.

The mules rushed on for four or five blocks, and came to the yellow car-line. They bore down on an approaching motor-car—but a mule was never known to collide with anything that would hurt him. Just in time they swerved, saw an automobile on the other side of them—and stopped. Meighton climbed on the wagon.

He could have stopped their flight now, but an idea had come to him—he did not wish to do so. They tore on toward the river. A mounted policeman overtook them on his motor-bike, at Fifth and Water Streets. He made a plunge for their heads. They swerved and the wagon crashed into the side of a negro lodging-house.

Meighton was flung violently on the sidewalk, while the policeman, who had handled mules in the past, reduced the team to order.

Meighton lay an instant on his back. As he got to his feet, a man who had followed in an automobile leaped from his car.

"Are you hurt?" he asked. "That was a sure plucky do of yours. Want to go to a hospital?"

"Get away with your hospital!" laughed Meighton. He limped, brushing off dust, toward the car. There was a rabble of boys about him.

"Take me home, will you?" Meighton asked the man with the motor-car.

"Hold on!" shouted the policeman who was still occupied with the mules. "Are you hurt? Wait a minute; I want to know how this runaway happened."

Meighton affected not to hear.

"Just banged up, that's all," he was saying to the owner of the car.

"Which way?"

"I don't live in the city."

"Well, I thought as much from the way you handled those mules."

"I can't ask you to take me clear out to Haven."

"Sure I'll do it." The car rolled swiftly toward Kansas City, Kansas—where extradition papers would be needed. "That's on the Kansas side," commented the motorist. "But it's not more than three or four miles. Do it easy!"

A little later, in his carnival costume, Meighton entered a clothing store in Haven, just outside Kansas City, Kansas.

"I've been in to the carnival," he remarked, looking down at his costume.

"Boys get your other clothes away from you?" shrewdly reckoned the shopkeeper.

"Something like that. Anyhow you can sell me a suit. I'm not going to get on the train looking like a circus clown."

As Meighton stepped, unobtrusively clad, from the shop, a sound greeted him. It was a pleasant sound to his ears, the voice of a creature to which he would always be profoundly grateful—it was the bray of the Missouri mule from a blacksmith-shop.

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He walked over to the little country depot near the blacksmith-shop and took a train for the West.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BREACH WIDENS.

IT was mid-morning in Blackwater. Julia was tidying the dining-room of the hotel—drawing down blinds, driving flies with the green bough of a maple-tree. Suddenly she could no longer bear what was in her heart. She flung the bough savagely to the floor, turned to a window, and pressed her arms against the sill, her face hard on her arms.

But her tea-rose bush grew under that window, and so she could not stay there. To-morrow she would tear that bush from the earth; it should never bear another rose—to smell and remind her of that moment of bliss.

She went back to a dim corner of the dining-room, where she stood with her breast against the sharp edge of the sideboard. But now—if the Sturtevants had not come that night, she would have been Mindel's wife two nights and a day.

Two nights and a day—that is a beginning for a lifetime.

By now, perhaps, she would have got quite used to it; to his touch that made her tremble, his eyes that used to call her very soul into hers. They would have grown sweetly commonplace to each other, perhaps, taking each other as a matter of course.

They would have spent one half day, at least, in going about the city looking for a home, and by now would have found some little place to live in together. By this time in the morning he would have gone off to the lumber-yard. She would be alone now, tidying his house, making ready for his return to her.

There were noises about the hotel—banging of doors, rattle of earthenware in the kitchen—she did not hear them. She seemed to look at the wall, but did not see the dirty, dark-green paper spotted with pink roses.

Her world was such a little one, really—one face, one voice. And now she would not see him again, forever.

She had been angry that he had not understood, and that he had turned on her at her own word with an unkind look and the name "Judas!" She had raged in her heart; her pride had been hurt that he, too, did not really trust the O'Malleys. She did not mind that now; she wanted only to see him again.

She was a woman who seldom wept, and she did not want to weep now. She closed her eyes, holding the lids close and shaking away the heavy drops which pushed through. She kept seeing that mouth of his, straining at its leash of muscles; passionate, unflinching, hard as the sphinx—but dear! And his eyes! They were blue when he looked at other men—or it might be green if he felt suspicious. But when they met hers—

Never to see those eyes again? She shivered and laid her face again on her arm. She was not angry with him now, she understood. He, who was shrewd in reading men, had been slow to comprehend her always. By now he had puzzled her out. He had slashed at her with that word "Judas!"

Well, wherever he was now, the memory of it was breaking his heart, too. It would be hard to find him, but somehow, in spite of the Sturtevants, she would. And when she told him what a dear, foolish soul he had showed himself—how ingenuous, and clumsy about catching a girl's meaning—

She laughed, and the laugh broke into a little, showery sob.

Then she saw that her brother had come into the room and was looking at her. Her tears stopped, and she flung him a furious look. He came nearer her; she stepped back to the wall and stood at bay—her eyes blackening, her fingers squeezing each other tightly.

"You needn't come around me now, Lanny O'Malley—nor ever again, after what you've done to me."

"Well, what-all did I do?" he teased.

"You and Beulah between you opened the letter Mindel wrote me from Kansas City—Beulah opened it and you both read

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Terrence Larkin inclined his head, scarcely knowing what he did.

"You seem to have taken this—girl," Lucianna went on deliberately. "Of course she has sacrificed everything—herself—for you. And you owe her equally as much. You owe her—yourself. That is clear, and fair, isn't it?"

"I owe her nothing," said Larkin quickly. "She will leave of her own accord."

Lucianna half closed her eyes.

"Terry, do you intend turning her out—just because I happened to come? Do you treat women, even in this part of the world, as brutally as that!"

She drew in her lower lip, paused, and looked up at him with eyes that were appealing. She continued:

"She is here by right. She belongs to you, however she came to you, and you belong to her. It is not a question, Terry, of you and I—and this girl. It goes farther, farther even than the difference of our races. Why, the whole world—humanity—is built on her faith in you and yours in her—and the faith of all men and women in women and men!"

Larkin shifted uneasily.

"You will be freed, Lim," he said.

The Malay's muscles relaxed, and a perplexed look shadowed his face.

"Lim, how long have you loved Koorie?"

"Always, *birahi*," whispered Lim with a scared look.

Larkin turned to Koorie. Her small face had become a scared yellow.

"Do you love—do you want to go away with Lim?"

"*Birahi*," she moaned, "I am so afraid. I want to go!"

Lucianna smiled faintly.

"But supposing I had come, Terry, and found that this native did not love Koorie, and that she did not love him. What would you have done then? Oh, Terry, I am not satisfied. I am going to ask Koorie some questions," she quickly added. "We must talk alone—we two. Go—and take Lim with you."

As the two men filed out, Murg sat up and displayed his fangs as they retreated to the shade of a palm. Larkin, hands on hips, looked at the doorway, and frowned. Lim Kongsi was also glancing in that direction with an expression of gloomy perplexity.

Lucianna sank down on the bench beside Koorie and drew one of the small, brown hands gently toward her.

"Little brown girl," she said softly, "I want you to answer all of my questions—truthfully. Will you promise?"

Koorie inclined her head humbly.

"How long have you loved Lim Kongsi? Always?"

The dark eyes turned and searched Lucianna's face curiously. Koorie nodded.

"And Lim Kongsi has loved you—always? Are you sure?"

The dark head bobbed vigorously.

"Did the white *birahi* love you? Did he say he loved you?" Lucianna was eager on this point.

Koorie lifted her heavy eyebrows as if the questionings of this strange, white woman were quite beyond her reasoning.

"My father beat me. *Birahi* bought me," she explained simply.

Lucianna's face brightened.

"He was kind," she murmured; "but he did not love you. And you loved Lim Kongsi. I ought to be satisfied. Koorie, I am satisfied!"

"You love *birahi?*" whispered Koorie furtively, "and he will buy you?"

Lucianna smiled and drew Koorie's head down to her shoulder.

"Lim Kongsi would kill for me," murmured Koorie.

Under the palm the men waited with growing anxiety. Nothing was borne down the wind to them but low murmurs and the delicate odor of ripening pepper-trees. Larkin advanced noisily to the veranda, where Murg climbed erect and growled.

Lucianna unfolded her arms from Koorie and smiled to him as he crossed the threshold. For a moment he held her, with her hands softly about his head. Then they were aroused by a scream from Koorie and a metallic clatter against the wall.

Terrence Larkin turned in time to hear the chain snap, to see a black mass with distended red jaws hurling toward him.

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That the figure might be Lucianna dawned upon him slowly. But Lucianna was six thousand miles away! His mouth grew cold under his tongue.

A long, faint whistle wailed in the hills. He splashed out to meet the boat.

"Turn back," he called. "Quick! There's danger!"

The sailors rested on their oars, and Larkin braced his feet in the soft bottom as the bow slid up to him. He disregarded Lucianna, who, with bright tears in her eyes, reached for his shoulder.

"Go back to the steamer," he panted. "I tell you, this place is dangerous. There's an outbreak—the Malays!"

"Danger? Then I'll most certainly stay—" said Lucianna with determination —"here—with you."

Larkin lifted his eyes from the black, bristling bundle at her feet to the fat man in the stern who was beckoning for his attention. Evidently he was the inspector.

"Dey haf run amuck—*ja?* Haf you let them haf r-r-rom?"

"No rum in three months, *mynheer?*"

"*Tot ver vlomme!* No r-r-rom in t'ree months!"

"No, *mynheer.*"

"I t'ink I will not go ashore," said the inspector resignedly.

Before Larkin could prevent her, Lucianna had seized the gunwale, jumped clear, and splashed, struggling to reach him, with water nearly to her breast. She tugged at a steel chain. A sailor helped, and Murg sprawled overboard.

The bedraggled trio reached the shore.

"If we need help," called Lucianna, "we will blow the whistle on the shed." She indicated the mill. "Now, I'm ready to face the music," she said to Larkin. "So far, young man, you haven't made any frantic efforts to kiss me. And I've come to tell you that I love you."

"You must go to the hut—on the hill—at once," he stammered, "if you value your life."

"But I value yours much more, dear," declared Lucianna.

"I—I must explain," he begged.

"So I gleaned from your cablegram," said Lucianna, mounting the path.

He waited until he saw her white dress through the trees, saw her climb the steps to the veranda, saw her enter the hut; whereupon he set off down the track, dragging Murg, unwilling after him.

The whistle sounded again in blasts that were long and insolent. The rails commenced ticking faintly, and the small locomotive, with a thick banner of black smoke trailing from the stack, burst from the sand dunes, rocking dangerously.

Larkin concealed himself from view behind a bush near the switch, and waited. The engine and its burdened flat-car swept down the track, careened wildly out upon the siding, balanced, sliding an instant on one rail, and plunged into the sand. Larkin recorded the hope that none of the fifty brown shapes catapulting through the air would be seriously injured.

Lim Kongsi, lying in the sand near the engine, stirred, climbed to his feet and staggered away dizzily toward the forest. Larkin unsnapped the chain and let the wolf go in pursuit. Murg growled and jumped forward. When Larkin caught up with them, Lim Kongsi was apparently frozen in his footprints. Murg was sniffing blood which dripped from three lance-like wounds in the calf of his leg.

VIII.

THE hand which snapped Murg's chain over the veranda railing was cold and clumsy. Terrence Larkin pushed the Malay ahead of him into the room, and followed.

Reflected sunlight from the bleached roof of the foreman's hut was shining through the solitary window in the back wall, outlining Lucianna's profile in a pink aura. She had taken a commanding position in the center of the room and was staring at Koorie, who was huddled meekly on a low bench, nervously fingering the neck of her cotton blouse. Lim Kongsi took the opposite corner.

Lucianna nodded as he was framed in the doorway. Her face was calm; she controlled the situation perfectly.

"I've come a long, long way to find you, Terry," she said. "I didn't think—I didn't imagine—our meeting would be—this."

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and the frightened Koorie, in which Lucianna fainted in his arms—and hovered near death for weeks.

He puffed sternly at the cheroot. His cablegram would mean the end of everything between them. That was best.

Red and yellow goblins, the aftermath of sun strain, trooped annoyingly in the darkness. It would be a difficult thing to single out a man in that cave of blackness. His nerves were protesting to-night.

A rustling, such as might be caused by a bare arm or leg scraping the bark of a tree, brought him up sharply. But the sound was only the midnight wind from the lagoon stirring the leaves. He settled back on the bench and allowed his muscles to relax as the coolness crept in.

Then something drove, hissing, past his ear and struck the hut wall with a smack. He dropped to his knees and examined the foreground, point by point. Sweat prickled out on his forehead. Black moved against inkier black. He aimed, sightless, at the tree.

A rod of flame, above his hand, furrowed the darkness. The echo was carried back from the hills. Padded steps fell a few yards out and to the right. He fired again. Some one was running toward the village. Lamps winked.

Koorie moaned, and he heard her bare feet scrape on the planks in the doorway.

"You are safe, *birahi?*"

"Go back to your bed, frightened one."

"*Birahi,* who is hurt? Who is hurt?"

"It may be—Lim Kongsi is dead. It does not matter."

He listened shrewdly for a betraying sign, but heard only the dull rattle of knuckles on wood, such as could have been caused by her hands, drawn carelessly past the door-jamb, to her sides.

As darkness sifted away, the thin outlines of a spear, its barbed head deep in the side timber, became distinct. He declined to feel resentful, reassuring himself that when the Tjibotas was hull down, he would dole out the Burmese rum impartially, and gain back the good will he had lost.

VII.

THE Tjibotas and the Elloise Belle dropped anchor outside the narrows during the night, to await daybreak and high tide, and crawled into the harbor, the schooner a tow, as Terrence Larkin was issuing orders of the day to the crew of half-naked men aboard the flat-car which trailed Lim Kongsi's engine.

The triple-toned whistle of the steamer boomed her presence, and he waved his hand for the train to be off. The engine tooted, and the flat-car with its sulking burden rattled away in the direction of the sand dunes where the track wound out of sight.

He estimated with pride the neat piles of dark lumber which partly obscured the mill. He had smashed all records for ironwood extraction since the island had been opened. He observed that the captain's gig had been lowered and was pulling toward the schooner.

Koorie pattered down the slope and crossed the wet sand. Her damp face bore evidence of a struggle.

"*Birahi,*" she faltered, digging her small toe into the sand, "they come—soon." She pointed nervously to the oil shed.

"I will kill Lim Kongsi," he said, turning his back.

"No—no, *birahi,*" groaned Koorie miserably.

"Go to the hut," he ordered.

The Dutch inspector, he argued, must not, under any circumstances, be a witness to this scene of rebellion. If Lim Kongsi returned, as Koorie had confessed, the crew would rush the oil shed. He made up his mind to employ their own momentum as the means of defeating their purpose.

Two hundred yards toward the dunes was a switch for side-tracking unused flat-cars. The siding curved sharply. An engine at full speed, if shunted upon that abrupt curve, would probably pitch violently from the track. That plan might be successful. He had no time to prepare a better one, and he retraced his steps to the beach.

The captain's gig was nearing shore. It was deep in the water; probably more than one inspector was preparing to honor him. As the boat drew closer he saw the figure of a woman in the bow, and she was waving to him.

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than ever. In the end it nearly cost him his life.

The actual existence of this unseen warfare was forced upon him, first by a wicked red eye in the night. He investigated, to find that a bonfire had been kindled in the center of the village, about which the elders were holding a serious conference.

He had forbidden fires at night, and the ring grew moodily silent at his approach. He kicked the bonfire apart and stamped out the embers. Ordinarily, one guilty of such an insult would have retained his life no longer than a swift blade is conscious of penetrating between ribs. Perhaps fear held them back.

There were no words spoken, and Larkin remained, statuelike, until the last man crept to his hut. One bare arm, with muscles stiff, stroked his hand in passing. He tried to recall which member of the ring had come from that direction. It was, as closely as he could reckon, the arm of Lim Kongsi, the quiet fellow who ran the logging engine.

He found Koorie shivering in the dark.

"The white master does not know the *Orang-Malaya*," she chattered. "Your life is unsafe, *birahi!*"

Larkin sat down to estimate the amount of ironwood he would have on hand when the Tjibotas called.

It was the day before the Tjibotas was due that Larkin's patience was given its hardest trial. He fell into the trap set for him with the guileless trust of a child. Several choppers came to him in the morning before sun-up, craving his opinion on a new section of lumber land. The request was not usual, but he complied in an instant. When he returned to the village enough time had elapsed for a renegade Chinese sloop to sneak into the harbor, discharge a cargo of Burmese rum, and skip out again.

The whole affair, from beginning to end, was an example of daring strategy. Instead of serving to prove to Larkin how keenly desirous his workmen were to be given a holiday, a respite from his iron discipline, it merely added new fuel to his anger.

Stubbornness was numbered among the qualities which had given him his opportunity, and he did not intend to desert it at this late hour. He slipped a revolver into his hip-pocket, tightened his lips, and confiscated all of the Burmese rum in sight.

He was confident that more was hidden, and he split open the visible casks with a belt ax, allowing the Malays to gather in a sullen group to watch the thin, yellow liquor gurgle and be sucked into the dry earth.

Before the foresters came home that evening, he made a hut to hut search, found more rum dextrously hidden, and heaped insult upon injury by compelling the offenders to carry the casks to the oil shed at the beach, where he placed the mill foreman on watch for the night. He had repented a little, and he intended letting them have it when the Tjibotas was hull down.

As he recrossed the timbered road he saw a slim, dark figure vanish from the region of the hut and dart into the palm grove. Perhaps it was his imagination, but something in the set of the shoulders vaguely suggested Lim Kongsi, the engineer.

But Koorie's denial was emphatic, maybe a trifle indignant. A girl, she said, had come to tell her of the white master's latest deed. She concluded with a fateful wag of her small head.

"*Birahi,* to-night you are in danger. Look, there is no moon. It is the night when the devils come out and dance."

After dark, Larkin extinguished both lights and settled down in a corner of the veranda. A commotion in the village reminded him that the elders would probably hold a war council. From the beach came the lisp of waves as the tide receded.

He lighted a white cheroot and reflected deeply upon Lucianna, tracing her face in the starry horizon. It occurred to him that his loss of her was being repaid by his quiet satisfaction in depriving her of these evil contacts. He knew that in spite of her vigorous protests, Lucianna mirrored completely the frailness, the dependence which modern standards have created in all women.

The violence of Sinabonga, the underhanded and vicious character of its people, would have exerted a withering influence upon her. His imagination carried him on to a scene between the shocked Lucianna

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the forward hatch, and then he glanced at the tender face of Lucianna, whose thoughts were supremely occupied elsewhere.

"I wonder," said Lucianna after awhile, "what Sinabonga is like."

"An ungodly place, miss," said Edgren, surveying her slimness with overlong stare. He was a wild figure, with a mass of rough, yellow hair above an alcoholic red face. His coarse shirt was open at the throat. His pants, of sail cloth, were drawn about his waist by means of a knotted cord. His feet were bare.

The compass, in a weather-stained binnacle, indicated due south, and he remarked for the third time that if the wind held, the Elloise Belle should fetch Sinabonga in a full two weeks.

The Elloise Belle rose and sank over the long swells until they became purple, and, with an abrupt sunset, inky black. One of the Malays brought them boiled rice and fish and threw scraps to Murg, who ate with the restraint of one performing a disagreeable duty. A match flame sputtered in the lee of the cabin hatch, and a lantern frame clicked. Edgren washed down his meal with a draft of rum.

"We should fetch Sinabonga in a full two weeks," Edgren said again.

Lucianna maintained silence.

"Not customary for a woman of your stamp to do—this," he added.

"I am an unconventional woman," responded Lucianna quietly. "This water tastes stale. Have you no other?"

"You are an un—un—con—" His tone was eager. "How is it spelt?"

Lucianna spelled it for him twice in rather an amused voice. Whereupon Edgren called one of the Malays to hold the wheel and went forward, returning shortly with a black pocket dictionary. He held the book to the lantern light and spelled out the meaning of "unconventional." Then he tossed the book to the deck and came to Lucianna's side. Murg arose to his feet, with the hair erect along his spine.

"You and me — are alone — out here," said Edgren, bringing his face down close to hers. "Just us—for two weeks."

The Malay at the wheel grunted softly, "*kaparat*," meaning fool.

"You forget—him," returned Lucianna composedly, drawing back to avoid his breath.

Edgren's chuckle ended as the black shape of the wolf arose before him; he straightened up in time to save himself, and the sharp fangs came away only with a fragment of his shirt. He continued to step backward in amazement until the back of his open hand struck the shoulder of the man at the wheel.

"Now set whatever other sails you have," said Lucianna calmly. "And let us hurry. If the two weeks become ten days, I will give you twenty-five dollars more—gold dollars."

VI.

AFFAIRS had been progressing smoothly, too smoothly, in fact, to please the Malayan temperament. Terrence Larkin had been driving his ironwood hunters, his choppers, and sawyers, with all of his energy, because he had been appraised by the captain of the Tjibotas that one of the East Indian Company's representatives would probably visit the island on a tour of inspection when the steamer next called. And he was anxious to show the inspector what an American, with an iron sense of discipline, could accomplish in the way of breaking records.

When his men, by one sign after another, showed that they were disciplined to follow the pace he had set, he realized that he understood the strange moods of the Malay less than ever, although he tried to bear in mind that they were a race as distinct from his as is the Chinese from the negro.

Insubordination cropped out in artless ways. Ironwood hunters returned from the forests with downcast faces and nothing to report. Choppers appeared at sundown, wearing expressions of childlike innocence and bearing ax-handles unaccountably broken.

There was a deadlock of forces. Larkin admitted to himself at last that, in deference to custom, his workmen should be given a vacation, an opportunity to run wild for a week or two. Yet he continued to hold himself blind to the little inklings they gave him — and drove them harder

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to rust color from hanging neglected on the nails which his predecessor had driven there. As Koorie lifted the kris, a black spider scuttled up the wall. Koorie screamed; the blade clattered dangerously near her feet.

V.

BEFORE Lucianna was released by the custom's officials of Sourabaya, she was compelled to chain Murg in a stuffy wharf shed, which is commonly known in that section of the world as a go-down.

It had been Terry Larkin's boast that chain and ring had never been forged to hold Murg, if Murg had other intentions. It so happened that Murg did have other intentions. Down came the chain and ring with a lump of red plank. The wolf, alone, with the chain clanking after him, loped to the far end of the go-down, where he unwittingly unearthed an important bit of information.

Mynheer Van Humple, a hairless, thin-lipped man, who directed the affairs of the Dutch East Indian Company, showed no more than the hint of a surprised frown when Lucianna presented herself in quest of information and advice.

Mynheer Van Humple had received a letter from Larkin, digested its contents, and destroyed it. He had grown accustomed to strange requests from his subordinates on the castaway islands, and he was prepared to follow his usual custom of granting them. He was prepared for the visit of a young woman named Lucianna Amarin; but he was not quite prepared for Lucianna.

Lucianna violated custom and a sign by opening his office door without knocking, and brought into the office a personality that was almost overwhelming.

She was dressed in white; soft, sheer white from her small, white hat to her small white shoes. Her eyes seemed to sparkle.

"Where is Terrence Larkin?" were the first crisp words to fall from her smiling lips. Without waiting for the surprised, bald-headed man to issue an invitation, Lucianna drew a wicker chair to face him, and seated herself with an air of youthful expectancy.

Mynheer Van Humple, temporarily disarmed by the hopeful gaze of the clear, blue eyes, hastily assembled his wits, passing an agitated hand over his bare head.

"It iss imposs-ible," he answered. Then, with greater adroitness: "*Ja*, it iss a violation of the rules to gif such information."

Lucianna's smile departed.

"I was afraid of that, too," she murmured, as if to some person not present.

Mynheer Van Humple followed her nervously to the doorway.

"You will go back—now? *Ja?*"

Lucianna shut the door gently in his face.

That happened in the days before the copra trade had raked every harbor of Java for carriers, so Lucianna without difficulty acquired, by charter, a sixty-foot sloop.

The following morning Mynheer Van Humple had occasion to visit the go-down where Murg had spent the afternoon previous. As he turned to retrace his steps, he grunted. Three strong packing cases, labeled in blurred stencil, "Via Hong Kong and Sourabaya. Consignee: T. Larkin, Sinabonga, D. E. I. Co. *via* C. J. and C.," stood in a row awaiting transshipment, one week from date, by the Tjibotas.

Had she seen them?

Across the face of one of the cases were four narrowly spaced scratches which might have been caused by a cargo hook. Yet Mynheer Van Humple had never, within his broad experience, observed a four-pronged cargo hook.

The rolling hills of sapphire foamed lazily at their crests. Yellow sails blossomed to the monsoon. Blocks and stays creaked rhythmically. In the stern sheets of the Elloise Belle, staring dreamily at the deck, sat Lucianna, and at her feet crouched Murg, moaning discontentedly in the scorching sun.

The wolf had had no desire to prolong his journey at sea, and he was gaunt and homesick. In addition, Edgren, the master of the Elloise Belle, was not to his liking.

Edgren's hand hung limply over the horizontal spoke of the wheel. As his body lurched with the motion of the boat he glanced sleepily at the three half-naked Malays who were huddled in the shade of

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Her silence and the humility of her attitude made her presence, to him, non-existant. He was absorbed in the task of driving unwilling gangs of Malays who felled great trees, and it gave him scant time to contemplate the whims of one so unimportant as Koorie.

Larkin was not informed until later that her father, Marak, head of the ironwood hunters, beat her each night with thongs across her naked shoulders until welts stood out like the tiny sand waves on a beach. That was why Koorie appeared so faithfully.

When he began to have a vague notion that this was happening, coupled with the thought was the memory of a brown, anxious face which peered from a tree on the occasions of Koorie's visits in the twilight.

The worried face he recognized as that of Lim Kongsi, a native in charge of the engine which brought logs from the forest to the beach.

On a miserably hot night, when he was at work over his desk clad only in pajamas, one thing was made quite clear to him. Koorie had been curled up in a little heap against the roof post, staring at him forlornly as he read. He was vaguely aware when she left, for she sighed twice and slipped away in the darkness toward the twinkling lights of the native quarter. A few clock-ticks later, a scream irritated him.

He found her in the yellow light of a smoking hut *dong*, with her father standing over her, a strip of caribou hide still trembling in his hand.

"She is wicked—wicked, master!" cried Marak, cringing.

With a sob, Koorie flung herself at his feet.

"She is the granddaughter of a white man, a Spaniard, master," whined Marak, his little eyes bulging. "She is priceless. She is a pearl. And she speaks the white man's tongue even better than I. Up! Speak for him, worthless one!"

"What is the price—child-beater?"

"Aye! The white master shall become a god. Aye! Great is *birahi!*"

"One month's pay," snapped Larkin.

"*Birahi,* thou art kind!" sobbed Marak.

So that, all in all, the sealed envelope brought to Larkin by the Tjibotas the morning that her black smoke again smudged the blue of the harbor, did not leave him in the happiest of states.

"Coming — Lucianna," read the cablegram.

"She will not come, she will not come!" he whispered.

Koorie, on the floor, breaking the green spurs from a ripe pineapple, lifted her eyes.

"Who?" she asked gravely.

"A woman of my kind, little meek one."

"Alone?" said Koorie, interested.

"No — with an *orang-gila* — a black devil," he told her.

Koorie bent to her work with a shiver, and Larkin crossed to his desk, pushed the blue-prints aside, and wrote his reply to the cablegram in three words: "Do not come."

He gave it to the captain of the Tjibotas, with several silver dollars, and instructed him to file the cablegram at Singapore. Then he walked to the beach, watched the captain's gig until it crept alongside the companion-ladder, and frowned at the steamer as the clank of her anchor chains sounded across the water.

When he returned to the hut he found Koorie on her knees, her hands stained with betel-nut which she was grinding into a thin vermilion paste in a hollowed stone. Spread out in a semi-circle before her were narrow fronds stripped from a palmetto bush. She pretended to ignore him until she had finished. With a tiny forefinger she smeared the red paste on the fronds and laid them in the form of an oval before the threshold, pressing them down with the palm of her hand until they adhered firmly.

"A great man of the Sikai of Pahang showed me this," she explained. "It is a charm, *birahi.* The black devil cannot cross." Koorie's face was flushed, and her lips were quite as red as the betel-nut stain on her fingers.

He wondered what Lucianna would say if she knew.

"*Birahi* — look!" Koorie skipped into the house and reached for a bone-handled knife having a wave-shaped blade, the favored weapon of the Malay. It had turned

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In those long, tiresome evenings, he was given ample opportunity to imagine the fate of Lucianna. He imagined calmly or passionately, however his thoughts might run, that she had forgotten him completely. Indeed, what mortal agency could inform him that she had half made up her mind to set out in search for him?

But his dreams were interrupted regularly at the hour of dusk by the patient, soft-footed ones. He accepted their visits calmly, dismissing them with the most curt and uncivil words in the Malayan vocabulary.

As the weeks passed, and the new white master displayed an increasing indifference to their charms, the persistence of the soft-footed ones waned.

Then came Koorie, she of the light skin, the fair hair, which he took to mean an inbreeding of white blood in her immediate ancestry. Her coming might have been by secret agreement with the others, for on the night that she stood over him, silent and meek, with eyes that seemed to hold star-glow, she was alone. She informed him haltingly that she spoke English, and illustrated it quaintly.

"Go back to your father," ordered Larkin, unmoved.

Koorie closed and opened her small fists, hesitated a moment, and obeyed.

Terrence Larkin's mind swam back, over six thousand miles of indigo sea, to Seattle. A thick mist had been blowing in from Puget Sound that memorable afternoon—and how lovely she had seemed, with her face wetted by the rain. Was the sacrifice worth this?

III.

WHATEVER time Terrence Larkin spent with his inner self, regretting the love that Lucianna could never return, he might have devoted to a more enterprising purpose. The fruitless hour between sun-sinking and dark he spent on his back under a palm-tree, allowing the ants to weave unhappy dreams for him in the fronds.

Lucianna was a creature of quick decisions, of a temperament so impulsive that she had good cause often to doubt herself, so that in spite of the bewildering suddenness of Terrence Larkin's wooing, her answer for him was framed on her lips no later than he was out of sight.

She did not resent his silence. It meant simply that he had deprived himself of her, aware that the land of his opportunity was no fit place for her. Lucianna's line of reasoning—although that is hardly the proper word—led her to an amazing decision.

That night her brother was shocked.

"I have found that I love Terry Larkin," she told him. "I mean, I have always loved him. As soon as I find where he is—I start."

"But he is a strange man!" gasped her brother, horrified.

"Perhaps I love him for that, too," retorted Lucianna, sighing.

"But, Lucianna, think—just think of a man who would bring a wolf—a live wolf—into Seattle—on the streets—at the end of a chain! He's wild! He's not fit for you, Lucianna. What—what do you intend doing with that brute?"

"We are going together, to find Terry Larkin."

"You'll never find him," he retorted. "Do you know what I think?"

"Who cares what you think?" said Lucianna crossly.

"I think you're—jilted! That's the plain word for it."

"Anyway, he's in Java—somewhere—and I'll find him," said Lucianna sweetly. "I cabled him, in care of the main office of the company, at Sourabaya, two hours ago. As soon as he replies, I start—probably within a month."

At their side, a hostile growl issued from the drooping jaws of Murg.

"You see?" said Lucianna, setting her dark eyebrows determinedly.

IV.

IT has been remarked that the soft-footed ones had obligingly ceded to Koorie all discoverer's rights to the quarry. When Larkin was engaged at the mill or in the forest, during the day, he was aware that Koorie, alone, scrubbed his hut and prepared his meals. Before he returned, she disappeared, returning regularly at sundown, sitting at his feet and gazing at him with reproachful eyes.

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"Wise animal!" murmured Lucianna, in the dusk. "Perhaps he has found his master."

The chain clattered to the floor. Murg sat down and rested his warm head against Lucianna's hand.

"Murg—is yours," said Larkin. "Some day you may find him useful. He will do one thing. He will fight for you. Good-by—Lucianna."

She walked with him to the edge of the veranda, then followed him with troubled eyes. Murg, with his lean forelegs sprawled puppy-fashion, regarded her cautiously, then ranged stiffly beside her, as if he had comprehended what the man had said.

As for Lucianna, she was quite sure that the only man she had ever cared for in her life had just walked out of it—without even leaving her his address!

II.

FROM the crow's nest, where Larkin was standing when the Tjibotas steamed through the narrows into the blue ringlet of a harbor, Sinabonga appeared to melt in green waves downward, from the line of hills printed darkly against the sky to the narrow fringe of white beach which came up out of the harbor like the white rim of a painted saucer.

Sinabonga, he had been informed, was an island far removed from the frequented traffic lanes. The Tjibotas, of the C. J. and C. Line, called there at distant intervals with mail and food. Once in months a Chinese sloop, bearing violent rum (which must not be sold to the Malays), crept in, her sounding lead plumping warily.

Terrence Larkin knew that Sinabonga was not a healthy place. He knew that if a man should grow careless, for instance, in the matter of his daily quinin allotment, death might walk up behind and tap him promptly on the shoulder.

In the main office at Sourabaya, he had been told these things, from the dripping, sleepless nights to the southern painlessness with which births are achieved. Also, he had heard a word or two regarding the conventions of Polynesia, conventions, he decided, that would scatter the declarations of Lucianna like chaff.

He took up the task of the dead superintendent, disregarding the brief attack of acclimation fever, and concentrated his attentions upon the business at hand, namely, the foresting of ironwood. Five years was the length of his contract with the East Indian Company.

Before a week was spent, he was privileged to examine the conventions of Sinabonga at close hand. From a day in the withering sun and dust in the sawmill, or in the closeness of the black forests, he returned to the colony on the hilltop to find that his hut had been put miraculously in order.

The Dutch wife of his mill foreman replied to his questions in a gutteral. Her thin, bloodless lips compressed when he thanked her, but she denied having entered his place. Her burned-out eyes looked beyond him at the hills. At the second occurrence of this strange denial, she turned and stamped away from him. She was fat, and the climate had sapped her congeniality.

Nevertheless, his rooms were swept and scrubbed to Dutch spick-and-spanness. The bed was neatly made. His supper was always ready, on the table. He was at a loss to account for it until, the fourth evening, when he stood on his veranda with the foreman, a group of Malay women strode up the hill from the native quarter and sank down on their knees before him. The foreman chuckled.

"What do they want?" said Larkin.

"*Mynheer,* I will ask." The foreman put a slow question to them in their tongue.

The women salaamed again until their heads touched their knees.

"It is the custom, *mynheer.* You are expected to make a choice."

"I'll make no choice. Tell those women not to come near my place again. How is that said in Malayese?"

"*Pergi lekas skalli, mynheer;* but it is time wasted."

The women withdrew, unruffled. As the foreman had said, such things are custom. White men had come to Singabonga before, and had accepted the custom without a dissenting murmur. But Larkin was prepared to ignore them indefinitely.

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"This is Mr. Terrence Larkin—and wolf," said Lucianna, not at all flustered. "I found them at the corner, both looking as if they had just been turned out of their home. But I couldn't allow a fraternity brother of yours, and his poor, lonely wolf to stand all alone in the rain, could I?"

"Lucianna, you must be mistaken!"

"Show him, Mr. Terrence Larkin," Lucianna retorted in triumph. "He is a fraternity brother of yours. I saw the pin. He tried to cover it. It has diamonds and sapphires. Mr. Larkin, open your coat and show him."

Larkin obediently unbuckled his coat and drew it back. On the curve of his capacious chest, with the deep blue of his flannel shirt for a setting, was a tiny black and gold pin, with Greek letters of diamond sparkling.

He was urged to stay, and he consented, early making the discovery that one day was not at all long enough for him to attend to his business affairs. The wheels of the company, which controlled hundreds of islands equally as important as Sinabong, revolved slowly.

It was perhaps the third day of his lengthened visit that Donald Amarin came to him and opened a conversation as if embarrassed.

"I want to know what you thought of my sister," he said with an effort.

"I think she is immense," declared Larkin, with his comfortable smile.

"Some people don't understand her, you know," went on the brother in apologetic tones. "The way she met you was—well, it was not conventional. She has peculiar notions, but I'm glad you weren't offended."

"So sweet of you to worry," came the clear, fresh voice of Lucianna from behind them. "I am not a schoolgirl. I can take care of myself—can't I, Murg?"

She bent down to stroke the silken ear. Her brother shrugged his shoulders and stalked into the house.

"Mr. Larkin—or Terrence, if you don't mind—do you consider me bold or unladylike?"

Larkin glanced seriously into her steady, blue eyes, and shook his head with decision.

"I was angry when I met you," said Lucianna, curiously watching the color grow in his cheeks. "I was buying flowers for a sick man. I hate buying flowers for—some sick men; not that they don't deserve all of the flowers they can possibly stand, but because every one always buys flowers for people when they're ill. It's only a habit. They buy flowers, because other people buy flowers. And that is conventional. I detest convention."

Larkin, who had never given the matter much thought, nodded comprehendingly.

"If it weren't for a few people who dare to look convention in the face—and ignore it," went on Lucianna with more passion than he had thought her capable of, "the world would stand still. Now you—you are going to a far-away island—a frontier maker. That's what I like to see men do. I—I detest the commonplace. And—Terry, I believe in saying what I think. For instance, if I should fall in love with a man, really and truly in love, I wouldn't hide my face behind a fan and simper and—hope. I'd come right out with it. I'd tell that man so! Now, does that impress you as wild?"

"You—you weren't contemplating any such remark, by any chance?" put in Larkin, grinning.

"Not—yet," said Lucianna seriously.

The evening he left for the Whippoorwill Camp, he told her he intended taking her back with him, and she smiled. He towered high above her brown head. He reached for her hand and held it. They were alone on the veranda, with Murg at their feet.

"The last few years have knocked my manners sky high," said Larkin hesitatingly, "or else I wouldn't say what's on my tongue now. Miss Amarin—Lucianna—I love you, and I'm going to kiss you goodby."

Lucianna turned white, then red.

"You don't dare!" she whispered.

He lifted his arms, then was thrust back so violently that he all but lost his footing. The wolf had lunged at him, with fangs bare, and neck and body bristling.

Larkin clanked the chain, but the wolf braced himself and growled. "Come on—you black devil!"

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They tried other hotels, with identical results. They were not wanted, so they turned forlornly up the main street in the darkening afternoon. Passers-by stopped, looked, and gave them a wide margin. Women picked up their skirts as they drew near. A policeman followed them a block, and changed his mind.

Larkin, his heavy shoulders bent downward under the looks that he and Murg were receiving, buttoned up the yellow and green coat with his free hand, and drew in the chain a few more links with the other. At the end of the chain, Murg, straining and slipping on the wet sidewalk, his long, bushy tail drooping miserably, looked upon the sights of his first city, and was not glad.

They turned and climbed upward, at a steep side street, to get away from the curiosity of the crowded thoroughfare. Larkin unbuttoned his coat and let the breeze blow against his heated chest. Murg dropped to the sidewalk and looked about him with a critical eye, his long, red tongue wagging as he panted.

Near by, an old Italian woman, a flower seller, with a tray of pansies, violets, and yellow blossoms, all soaked in the mist, was sorting over her wares for an impatient young woman.

The young woman, who was more than pretty, attracted Larkin's attention at once. She was fumbling two bunches of violets in evident distaste or reluctance. With a nervous movement she dropped them back upon the tray and picked up a cluster of the yellow blossoms. She sniffed these, put them back impulsively, and turned away with a look of decision.

If the pair expected her to shrink back in fright, they were disappointed, for there was no trace of fear in her expression. Her face wore a look of sudden, bright interest. Larkin shifted uneasily to the other foot, while Murg arose stiffly, not removing his sharp gray eyes from hers.

"Is he ugly?" she said. "Will he bite if I pat him?"

"Murg," he said quietly.

Murg sniffed at the girl approvingly.

"Now," said Larkin.

"May I touch him?" she asked. "Isn't he a beauty! I never saw a husky so large."

"He's not a husky," corrected Larkin; "pure wolf."

"Wolf!" The girl receded a step, but smiled and dropped her gloved hand to Murg's dilating nose, and patted it. She glanced up again brightly and surveyed Larkin, evidently not with displeasure, and he returned her glance with eagerness in which there was more than a trace of hunger.

She apparently had no intention of closing their acquaintance abruptly. She smiled peculiarly.

"Are you going—this way?" she indicated the direction.

Larkin frowned slightly under the thin, red stubble, and hesitated. He believed he had deciphered the smile, but was not sure.

"You needn't be afraid of me," said the girl, smiling. "I won't steal your wolf—or you."

They turned in at a house after a brisk walk through the rain in which he told her of Murg's upbringing.

"A trapper brought him into camp, and I bought him. He was a little fellow, scarcely a month old, with brown, soft hair, and homesick eyes. When I picked him up he curled his lip a little and snarled. It sounded like 'murg,' so I took him in and called him that. I've had him ever since I—"

"Ever since when?" interrupted the girl, with a repetition of the mysterious smile—and rang the bell.

"Ever since," stated Larkin calmly. "But Murg doesn't love me. He hasn't found his man yet."

"His—what?"

"Wolves are peculiar," he explained. "The wolf is like the Alaskan husky, or the Canton Chow, only more so. He's a one-man dog. Once he finds his man, he'll stand by him—and die for him; and wo to the man who lays hands on his master, even in kindness. The jealousy of a wolf is deeper than hate!"

A young man answered their ring and looked in amazement from the girl to Larkin and the wolf.

"Lucianna!" was all he could say.

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By Mercy of Murg

by Loring Brent

I.

A THICK mist was drifting in from Puget Sound the afternoon that Terrence Larkin came into Seattle, so that his embarrassment was not so keen as it might have been. He muscled his way through the smoker into the baggage-car ahead. His shoulders were so broad that it seemed impossible for the narrow doorway to let him through, and they were thick, the other way, in proportion.

In the baggage car, he released Murg from the thong and ring in the sidewall, extracted a steel chain and clasp from his pocket and snapped it on the brass ring in the collar. The man in charge of the baggage-car moved respectfully to the side door, pushed it back, and advanced the suggestion that it would be better for the safety of the passengers if the "black brute" should be dragged out through that exit instead of the door at the end.

Terrence Larkin did as he was ordered, clanked the chain over the shaggy, black hair, and clicked his tongue. The animal looked up with clear eyes of understanding, but resisted as he was dragged across the car and through the door. His long, sharp claws dug into the car floor; then he scrambled down and shook himself nervously.

The head of the baggage man appeared at the doorway. "Husky?" he inquired.

Terrence Larkin shook his head, clicked his tongue again, and the strange pair passed from the Union Station to the street.

Terrence Larkin had come to Seattle, from the Whippoorwill Camp, in such hasty response to a letter that he had not had time to change his clothes, and he could not be blamed if he felt ill at ease in the strange costume. But it was his intention to finish his errand and return to camp by the midnight train.

Unfortunately, the office of the East India Company was closed for the afternoon. Larkin accepted events precisely as they presented themselves. So he stooped down to pat Murg and hazarded the guess that they would have to stay overnight in any hotel that would be good enough to take them in. Already he had doubts.

He was not cordially received. No bell-boy raced to meet him, and the room clerk, a person of bulging eyes and prominently high, white collar, rested on his hands and looked down disapprovingly at Murg.

"We don't allow them in here, you ought to know," he told Larkin coldly.

His perceiving eye ran up and down and across the length and breadth of Larkin's long, broad frame, rested upon the orange and green lumberman's coat, and traveled again to the rough corduroy pants and the heavy hob-nailed boots.

"You'll admit he's not a husky," declared the room clerk as Larkin hesitated.

"What if he's not?" was Larkin's heated answer. "He's mine, my friend. You know the old saying: Take both, leave both; where I goes, he goes."

The clerk drew back with a frosted air,

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ested listened throughout, but he made no comments.

"Uh-huh," he said, when Dan had finished. "Wait here."

He left the room, and returned in a moment with Bragg. He signed the latter to a seat.

"Mr. Bragg," he remarked, "McCarty says you've fired him?"

"Yes," was Bragg's brief rejoinder.

"What for?"

"Insubordination."

"Oh," said Henderson. "Insubordination. H-m—that's bad. Can't run a business without teamwork, can you, Mr. Bragg? Well, McCarty, everything seems to be shipshape. I guess you're really fired."

"Is that all?" inquired Bragg.

"I believe so," said Henderson.

Bragg darted a glance at McCarty as he stepped toward the door. With his hand on the knob, Henderson halted him.

"Er—by the way, Mr. Bragg," he remarked. "I neglected to mention—you're fired, too."

"What?" gasped Bragg angrily. "Me—fired?"

"Yes."

A spasm of fury flashed across Bragg's features.

"You can't do it!" he snapped. "I'm under contract to the end of the year!"

"Why, as to that," said Henderso blandly, "if you'll stop at the boo keeper's desk on your way out, you'll find a check for the balance due you on your year's salary, and you can quit to-day. Rather do it that way. Saves me money and trouble in the end."

Bragg hesitated a moment in speechless rage; finally he stalked out and slammed the door.

"Well, Mr. McCarty," said Henderson, "you may fill Bragg's place until the end of the year. If you succeed, the place will be permanent. For the present you'll get $250."

"Thank you," gasped McCarty, on the verge of fainting.

"By the way, McCarty," continued Henderson, "what's come over you lately? I've known for some time, of course, that Bragg would have to go, but I'd about despaired of getting a man to take his place. It had to be some one used to our way of doing things, and you were the only one I could see that was in line—but, good Lord, I'd about given you up!

"Till the last six months or so, I've never seen you show the slightest push or initiative. A man without it couldn't fill this job at all, you know. Frankly, I didn't see how the dickens I could afford to try you. It would be interesting, as a matter of psychology, if nothing more, to know what changed you all at once?"

McCarty flushed. To tell or not to tell? Then he flung himself upon the old man's mercy.

"H-m," mused Henderson, at the close. "I wonder, I wonder! Honestly, if I'd known that five thousand dollars would have had that effect on you, I believe I'd have slipped it to you myself, just to save myself the worry. Gad, it would have been worth it! Do you think that there's any danger of your slumping, now that you haven't got it?"

"No, sir," said Daniel McCarty briskly. "I think this job is going to have the same effect as my legacy, Mr. Henderson!"

ROMEO AND JULIET

So great their perfect trust and faith,
Death turned their loss to gain;
They never knew love's bitterness,
Nor felt its utter pain.

But I, who sit alone and weep,
Shall never know the bliss
Of living once upon your breast
And dying on your kiss!

Isabel Redcliffe.

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"I don't know what you're talking about," countered Bragg curtly, "but I think you must be crazy. Anyhow, you're fired. Get out!"

Daniel McCarty went to the main office. He might very well be fired! Probably he was, and he didn't care—but just because he didn't care he was going to raise a howl about it loud enough for the old man to hear! And some of the things he would say would strain all Bragg's powers to explain if the old man saw fit to probe him about them!

At the main office he addressed the stenographer nearest the door.

"I want to see Mr. Henderson."

"He isn't here, Mr. McCarty," said the girl. "He went to St. Louis yesterday. We expect him back to-morrow morning."

Dan hesitated a moment, wondering if there was any use in seeing Mr. Madison, the second in authority, and decided against it. It would be better to go straight to the head.

"What time to-morrow will he be in?" he inquired.

"I heard him tell Mr. Rowe nine o'clock."

Dan nodded and went out. There was nothing to do the rest of the day. He felt at ease with the world—he'd loaf and celebrate. A few weeks more and he'd be a full-fledged farmer.

His hands ached suddenly to get a grip on the handles of a plow, and his nostrils yearned for the smell of the damp, upturned earth, with the scent of the orchard blowing across the fields, with a dog barking at his heels, and chickens scratching in the furrows behind him. He'd miss the city, of course—one got used to it in fifteen years, but there would be compensations.

To-day, though? Where should he go? The Zoo? There were trees and flowers there—yes, apple-trees, too! Would they be in bloom? Was it too early or too late for that? By George, he had almost forgotten! The Zoo, then, let it be.

When he arrived at his rooms that night it was late. There was a letter there for him with a wide black border on it. He felt a nauseated sinking of the heart.

He tore it open, trembling. It—it showed how much—no—how little—the doctors knew! They had given Cousin Matt eighteen months; he had had barely four!

Dan sank in his chair, overcome. A feeling of utter desolation swept over him. The whole world was wrong—unutterably wrong. Good old Matt was gone—gone with him the five thousand dollars—gone with him the farm. If he had lived two months more—only two months!

A tinge of shame flooded him to think that one of his first thoughts was for the money. But he was only human, and the loss of that flatly had to be faced—had to be faced—because he was now out of a job!

Came finally gray morning and lighted Dan's weary but, thank God, still determined face.

At ten minutes after nine he stood in Henderson's office, pouring out his story of Bragg's baiting, not as he had planned it yesterday, but with all the desperate fervor of a man fighting for his bread and butter. He knew it was win or join the bread-line. Jobs simply couldn't be found now, and he was not so young as he had been once.

". . . and for that Mr. Bragg fired me," he concluded. "Mr. Henderson, does that go?"

Henderson pushed a bell. A boy answered.

"Call Mr. Bragg," said the old man laconically. Then he turned to McCarty again.

"Mr. Bragg has considerable ability, don't you think?" he inquired.

McCarty wouldn't lie. "Oh, he's smart enough," he said miserably.

"Yes," said Henderson, "I always thought so, but I regret to say his department has made a very poor showing the last two years. Would you be good enough to tell me to what you ascribe that?"

Would he? That was what he was wild to do! He would show the old man that he knew something about the business, at any rate! Maybe he'd get a chance somewhere.

"Mr. Bragg is wasting money in three lines," he began. Henderson was an inter-

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Gradually in the weeks that followed Dan's spine stiffened until presently Bragg began to notice it, and to wonder if he'd have to get rid of old McCarty after all. When he asked Dan for an accommodation—" ten dollars till next Monday "—he met with a dun for the seventy dollars he had already borrowed. Coming from McCarty, it rather disconcerted him.

Dan, however, was becoming reckless. It was only three months until June, and at a pinch he had saved enough to get through till then—especially if he could get that seventy from Bragg. So for three weeks he made a point of asking for it each pay-day — which was intolerable to Bragg, who just then was losing heavily at cards at the club he patronized, where he found most of the members a trifle too expert with the pasteboards for him to nick their bank-rolls.

Both of them realized that a settlement was inevitable soon. Bragg had noticed for some time that McCarty, the worm, was turning, but only when the latter one morning ventured to point out that an inadvertence of his (Bragg's) had cost the firm three hundred and fifty dollars that month, did he see the necessity of hastening the matter.

If a thing like that should come to the ears of the old man, there would be a devil of a row. Gad! He'd better fire McCarty quick before he stumbled on something else!

Dan, on the other hand, was rolling up the delayed indignation of years into one colossal heap. A dozen times he caught himself on the verge of open rebellion.

But was it worth while now to get himself fired? Only seven weeks more, anyhow, and the extra hundred and twenty-five would help on that farm. In the earlier years of his grievance he had had vaguely formulated ideas of taking his complaint directly to Henderson. But then he hadn't dared. He never had felt comfortable under the sardonic, searching eye of the old man; and suppose he became confused, and couldn't make his charge sound convincing enough? No, he could not—

That was in the days when his spring was broken—when he was McCarty minus. Now McCarty was almost himself again, and it was different.

On Friday, Bragg laid a sheet of estimates on his desk. By the clock it was three, two hours until quitting time.

" Wish you'd run over these and check 'em up," said Bragg insolently. " You know how. Can do it just as easy as I can. The glue-room figures aren't there. Get 'em from Grimm."

" I'll not be able to get through with my own work before five," suggested Dan.

" Let that go, then," said Bragg. " I want these in the morning. Put in a couple hours' overtime if you have to—but get 'em done, that's all!" And he sauntered out of the office clad in holiday array, palpably on pleasure bent.

Of course, there was no rule binding Bragg to certain hours as there was for Dan; still, the work had to be done, and Bragg couldn't leave at three in the afternoon and keep things going unless Dan handled a dozen very important closing reports of the day. This he had done time and again, necessitating overtime to finish his own work.

The next morning Bragg, irritable and rather the worse for wear, demanded the report. Dan handed him the sheets in silence. Bragg glanced at them.

" Damn!" he exploded. " You haven't done a thing to 'em! The old man wants 'em in by noon! What did I tell you yesterday?"

" I've been doing overtime now for three years—on your work," said Dan. " I'm through. I'm not being paid anything for it."

" Oh, that's the idea, is it?" snarled Bragg. " Well, from now on, you're not being paid anything for anything by this company! You're fired!"

Dan took down his hat and coat. He paused at Bragg's desk as he passed out.

" If you would pay me that seventy dollars, I would be—"

" What — seventy — dollars?" asked Bragg, with a sneer.

" The seventy dollars you borrowed from me — in five and ten dollar instalments," said McCarty firmly.

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the gay and noisy friends of Matthew's son and daughter; effervescent with lights and laughter, ringing with dancing and singing. Seeing the condemned man eying the scene wistfully, he felt a choking sensation in his throat, and an unreasoning, unjustified anger at the thought that the children were heartlessly dancing fairly upon their father's grave.

But the anger was foolish, he realized, for they did not know, and would not, until the very last.

Presently he overheard Matthew telling some one that he was going to retire from business with the first of the year—that he had made his little pile, and was going in for a good time now, and meant to have it. And, strangely enough, he looked as if that was the truth; he didn't appear to be ill at all, or worried, or depressed.

There was heroism for you! Good old Matthew! Dan felt an illogical desire suddenly to tell these silly, vapid creatures—he never had had much use for the Frame children or their friends—what sort of a man they had for a father. He stifled it.

Finally he got a word with Matthew at the gate when he left. He choked on his thanks, and gripped his cousin's hand hard.

"Don't mention it, Dan," said the other sturdily. "You're a mighty good sort, and I'm glad I can do it for you. Come again soon, and remember, the cash will be yours in June."

And Dan, blinded to the bitter, lonely vigils of the doomed man, the secret, quivering agony, and the anguished tears, went home to his dingy, chilly rooms, marveling at the iron nerves and incredible endurance of his cousin.

To the man who for five years has been living on seventeen and a half dollars per weeks, and saving none of it, who has been hard put to it sometimes to make both ends meet because his employer borrows from him and neglects to pay back, a thing like this can't happen without having something more than a mere passing effect.

In spite of his hard day at the office, in spite of the lateness of the hour and his fatigue, Dan couldn't sleep that night. He couldn't get poor Matthew out of his mind, nor the five thousand dollars. Throughout that night and the long, lonely Christmas he pondered upon the mysterious and hidden things of life. What did it all mean?

Here was Matthew, hale, genial, and brave, but already inoculated with the fatal virus. He was a good man, clean and straight as a pine, and yet he had to go.

The pathos of it! Had to go, knowing that he was leaving behind him children who would never follow in his straight and narrow pathway; children to whom he dared not leave his wealth for fear of their complete and utter ruin. He had to give it away, so that after his death it might not be his curse left upon them.

And there was Dan's own wife, Minnie, and the little daughter, dead now twelve years, and himself left alone, broken in spirit, too beaten by fate to care much for life, yet too wilful, too, to wish to die. So he lived on, the butt of Bragg, to benefit by the hurt of his cousin, and to pass a lonely Christmas revolving in his mind the hopeless bungling of life.

No man gets very far toward the solution of such a problem as that, however; and Dan, fortunately, became sidetracked. It flashed upon him suddenly that, after all, the best days of his life had been when he and Minnie were young folk upon the farm.

He remembered whimsically the brooklet that trickled through the meadow, the tall sycamores on its banks, the sunfish in the pools; he recalled the whitewashed schoolhouse, the initials scarring the beeches; the old life came back to him all at once with startling clarity, bringing a suggestion of healing and peace with it.

Some time that day he reached a decision. The five thousand would buy him a farm beyond the bullying of Bragg, and he would till the soil again as in his youth. His future was assured!

Suddenly the broken spring began to weld, the shattered bamboo to grow together again, and the worn elastic to renew itself, while Daniel McCarty once more was on the way to be a man. That was what Matthew's Christmas gift had done for his cousin.

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haven't seen one another oftener than maybe twice a year, and have never been very intimate. Well, I am going to put my house in order.

I am worth about eighty thousand dollars and I have never done anything much for my relations, so I am going to make up for that now if I can. I am going to leave the house and ten thousand each to the children, and that is all. They are spoiled now, and to leave them more than that would be sure ruin for them, and I know it. I have not told them I was going to die soon, and will not.

I don't trust the law much, so I am not going to make provision in my will for any but the children. Wills are too easy broken and the lawyers get the money. The balance I am going to give away within the next year, and your share will be a little more than five thousand.

Now, this may seem strange to you, telling you six months ahead, because the mining property that is to bring in your share can't be realized on until the first of June, when the syndicate buying it will pay the last instalment; but I thought maybe it might help to make you a merry Christmas to know it was coming, and I guess you haven't had so very many of them since your wife died, have you, Dan? So if you will come to see me the second of June, I will give you the cash then.

I'm not like some people—giving to charity when they've got relations that could use the money. Wishing you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, Dan,

Your cousin,
MATT FRAME.

Bewilderment, regret, and joy alternated in Dan, and surged visibly across his face. Matt cutting off his children with ten thousand! Matt under sentence of death! Five thousand the 1st of June! He gasped weakly.

The outer door opened, and Bragg, clothed in a natty new light-gray overcoat, entered the office with clouds of tobacco-smoke and an unmistakable "peeve."

The instinct of self-preservation was strong in Dan. He stuffed the letter hurriedly in his pocket, and mastered his emotions. Bragg saw only his despised and plodding clerk at work upon a troublesome estimate of the number of sash destroyed in the late wreck on the C. H. and D.

Had he not been tortured with a splitting headache, he scarcely could have helped noticing something unusual in his subordinate's manner. As it was, he was in no condition to make the most of the opportunities that offered.

Frankly, he seldom was in condition to do that. The past year he had been playing fast and loose with himself. There was a girl in the case, and she was costing him a pretty penny. Frequently the morning after found him "broke" and bitter.

He had to be at the office by eight. Henderson wouldn't stand for anything less than that. The girl in the case slept off her share of the champagne in blissful unconsciousness, rising about three in the afternoon to a leisurely preparation for meeting the jaded Bragg in the evening for another bout of wine, song, and dance.

Bragg had no thought of rebelling at this evening program, but he did hate the enforced daily attendance at the office. Occasionally he risked a day off on the plea of illness. On such occasions McCarty did the work for two, and rarely left before nine in the evening.

Of late Bragg had contracted another distressing habit — that of borrowing five or ten dollars on a Monday morning from his subordinate; an easy matter, in as much as Dan was afraid to refuse. Times were too hard, jobs too scarce, his tenure there too uncertain for him to risk refusing. So Bragg found it easier to borrow than Dad did to get himself repaid.

Bragg put him off from time to time with scant courtesy. He was now some seventy dollars in debt to McCarty. Dan knew that if Bragg heard of his legacy, he would feel very little disposition to hurry the repayment of the seventy dollars; and he had sudden, terrifying visions of Bragg demanding the entire legacy, and of himself meekly handing it over, for fear of losing his job.

Absurd visions, of course; still, they had sturdy roots in the soil of fact. Dan breathed no word of his good fortune.

Bragg was unfit to do his work that day, and consequently in an ugly temper. He unloaded both upon Dan's broad, uncomplaining shoulders. But somehow the day was over at length, and Dan, after a hurried supper, made off to Matthew's house in the suburbs.

There he found the place overrun with

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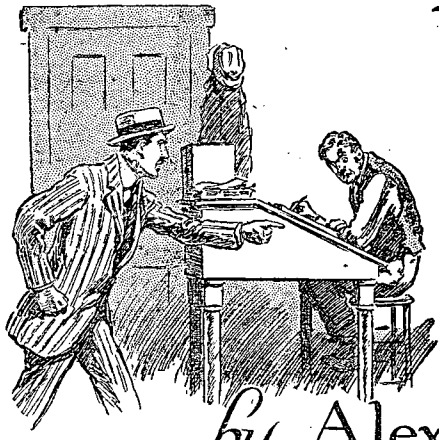

McCarty's Legacy

by Alexander Hull

DANIEL McCARTY was fat, unassertive, slightly bald, and thirty-seven. Viewed in cold black and white, that seems rather a terrific indictment of Dan, who was really a very good sort.

When you first saw him, with his ruddy, full-moon, Irish face and his somewhat bustling manner, you thought that he was a capable, pushing sort of man. Five minutes with him, however, would sufficiently convince you that you were badly mistaken.

He was a broken spring, a worn-out elastic, a shattered bamboo; the resiliency was gone from him. He would take an insolent order to do another man's work with an apologetic smile, and would work overtime to finish. There was no come-back in him.

He had reached that pathetic stage in disillusionment that told him he would never go higher, but that he might expect shortly to go lower. For the present he lived comfortably on his seventy-dollar salary, but he was expecting momentarily, what with the hard times, Braggs' contumacy, and his own discouragement, to lose his job.

Thus, if there was any assertiveness in his make-up, caution and fear combined to suppress it.

McCarty worked in the Standard Millwork Company's factory office, a little room walled off in one corner of the building. Through the partitions could be heard the incessant whirring and rumbling of the machines, although McCarty was so accustomed to them that he never noticed the noise which was so confusing to a stranger. Here, also, was the desk of Bragg, Dan's immediate superior — although there was a great gulf fixed between them, a gulf that only an increase of a hundred and eighty dollars a month in salary could bridge for Dan.

Bragg held the power of life and death over his subordinate; in other words, Bragg could hire or fire his assistant at will, and Daniel McCarty feared him accordingly. With the main office at the other end of the property, where presided the sardonic old man, Henderson, McCarty had nothing to do. In this petty feudal system Bragg was his immediate overlord, knew it, and made the most of it.

One morning—the 24th of December, to be exact—Dan found at his tall and dusty desk, in addition to the firm's letters referred to him for replies or data, a letter addressed to himself personally. He glanced at it, a little perplexed for a moment, scratching his head with the tip of his pen.

Then he brightened suddenly. A Christmas card, to be sure! He opened it, and found he was both right and wrong.

DEAR DAN:

A few days ago I went to see a specialist, and he told me I had about eighteen months yet to live. It will be pretty hard to go out at fifty and a half, but I guess I'm as near ready now as I ever will be.

Now, Cousin Dan, maybe you will be surprised at what I say, especially when we

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aunt, and from the odd coppers and nickels which he had picked up here and there by doing small favors for strangers, he had at last scraped enough together to buy this master marvel of the goldsmith's art. Now it was his own.

Only one cloud prevented the perfection of his happiness. He simply did not dare to tell his aunt about his purchase. She was so good to him in everything, so much like a mother, that he greatly longed to share with her his overwhelming joy; but he feared a lecture on the folly of spending so great a sum on so small a trifle.

His aunt, it should be said, was the only relative that Jimmy had in the world. His own father and mother had died years before in California, and a kind traveler had brought the little fellow East, to his next and only kin.

Jimmy decided that the ring would have to be hidden from his aunt. The decision caused him a pang of regret, but it was only momentary.

Buoyantly he trips down the street, lifting his little hand every now and then to marvel over and over again at the glittering monster on his finger.

Thus we leave him, and forever.

VI.

LET us now go back to the year '50 and to the gold-fields of California.

Toward the close of an afternoon in late autumn, a man might have been seen running through the forest in the vicinity of what is now Stockton. His frame was massive, but considering what the man's build had obviously once been, it could hardly have been called more than a frame. The double fatigue of winning a life from the wilderness and of searching for his share of the Eldorado, had in a year's time —a year with luck against him—exacted a heavy toll of flesh.

On his grizzled face, almost savage in the wildness of its expression, the lines of iron resolution had overlaid and almost obliterated those of anguish and despair.

As he now ran, he pressed his hand against his shirt, where bulged and bobbed what seemed to be a heavy, bulky package. Whatever he was carrying, it is certain he could have held it more conveniently in the open at his side—strange burden that needs must be hidden from the very blindness of the wilderness!

At the other side of a clearing, which the man was approaching at a good, stiff gait, there stood a lone, rude log-cabin, no better, no worse than the run of settlers' cabins in those days.

A woman was splitting wood before the door. She was tall, and, despite her hollow cheeks, not uncomely; but on her, too, the privations of primitive life had heavily told.

As she lifted a bundle of the wood she had chopped and straightened up under the weight of the load, a close observer might have seen in outline under her loose, half-ragged wrapper, and in relief against her gaunt and bony frame, the slight but unmistakable signs that another life was rounding into form.

She now stepped toward the cabin, and had just entered it when the man emerged from the forest, crossed the clearing quickly, and with a cry burst through the open doorway.

Mrs. Gordon (for it was the mother of the man whose history we have traced in the preceding sketches) dropped her wood, screaming, and turned round, ashen pale, to front the intruder.

"Heavens, Jim! How you frightened me!" she exclaimed.

It was true. She leaned on the table for support.

"Damn it all!" growled Jim. "It's worth being frightened for—this is!"

Saying which, he drew from his shirt the bundle he had carried so guardedly, and banged it on the table. It was a cotton bag, evidently filled with a weighty, lumpy substance.

Mrs. Gordon's eyes seemed to burst, so rapidly did their size increase.

"Is it—? Is it—? Is it—?" she shrieked, almost hysterical with expectation.

"Look for yourself," snapped Jim.

Then, as he let go the bag, it toppled over, and several pebbles shot with yellow rolled out on the table.

"Gold!" Mrs. Gordon screamed. "Gold!" she groaned. "Gold!" she whispered, and collapsed completely in a swoon.

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The sun was just beginning to touch the tops of the tallest trees.

Bathed in intermittent flashes of its glory as they passed in and out among the shadows, the pair strolled onward hand in hand, lost in silence and a sweet content.

It was Jim whose attention was first captured by the grandeur lighting the western sky.

"Laura," he exclaimed, "look! Did you ever see a sky more magnificent! The trees," he added, "are in our way here. Let's go down to the water, where we can get a clearer view."

So they tripped down the steep bank, laughing and chatting, and stood at the water's edge.

In those days, before the gods of money had dulled his finer senses, and before crime had made him bitter, there was a bit of the poet in Gordon. He keenly felt the spell of Nature's artistry, and as he now stood, his whole spirit seemed to soar upward and onward into the surrounding splendor.

Onward his thoughts sped, past the golden screen of light, out among the worlds stretched beyond in infinite succession, onward toward the very throne of the God whose glory spread before him lifted him up to its own sublimity.

From God—such is the way of youth—his thoughts turned to the girl beside him. He wondered if she, too, were so profoundly moved by the awful majesty of the scene. It seemed almost a sacrilege to break the silence, but he broke it.

"Laura," he whispered, "I'm just wondering what you are thinking about."

"Well, Jim," returned the girl, "I was just thinking that if we don't hurry back home we'll be late for supper."

She said it so sweetly, and looked up at him so entreatingly with her large, blue eyes, that he instantly forgot with what a jar she had disturbed his dreams.

"That seems a very sensible idea," he answered laughingly. "Let's go."

Quite naturally, the bank seemed much steeper on the upward way than it had in the descent, and just as naturally, Jim, going first, reached back his hand to assist his fair companion. Thus, with a great deal of giggling and chuckling, and screaming in miniature, they made their way slowly to the top.

He was reaching forth his hand to help her over the last remaining obstacle, when suddenly he drew himself up as though smitten with the sight of a vision.

"For God's sake, Laura," he called, "stand still!"

The earnestness of his look frightened her.

"Why, what's the matter?" she cried; she trembled, but she did not stir.

"Your hair!" he shouted. "Your hair! The sunlight on it! It's a mass of gold, pure, molten gold! It's gold, I say! It's wonderful! Wonderful! It's gold!"

And with a rudeness that neither noticed he pulled the girl toward him. Then, as her head came to a level with his breast, "I love you!" he cried. "I love you! I never knew it before, but I love you more than life! I love you! You have gold for hair! Gold! Gold! Oh, I love you! I love you!"

V.

For a last picture of James Gordon we go back to the time when he was a lad of fourteen. We see him emerging from a jeweler's shop in Maiden Lane.

An almost seraphic joy lights his childish face as he stops in the sunlight before the door, and, twisting and turning his hand, admires the light as it plays over the curiously contorted lion's head on a large gold ring.

The ring is his at last—the first ring of real, solid gold that he has ever owned; and it cost all of fifteen dollars, too.

For more than a year he had been looking forward to the day when this ring should be his. He had first seen it in the jeweler's shop as he passed through this street on some errand for his employer, and since that time he had often come blocks out of his way to visit this spot, to press his little nose against the show-window and feed himself in imagination on the joy of possessing this great, grinning, golden lion.

From his share of his weekly earnings of two and a half dollars, which he had to turn over almost *in toto* to his guardian

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"Can it really be that late?" he thought. "It's a mighty good thing the old man doesn't know about this, or I'd get a nice little lecture in the morning about doing things right the first time. Well, what he doesn't know won't worry him.

"Funny thing how little he does know about what goes on around here, as much as he seems to stick his nose into everybody's business. For all he'd know about it, I could put this whole place into my vest-pocket some night and walk off with it."

That was a thought that startled Gordon. If he could "walk off with the whole place," it would certainly be the simplest matter in the world to make off with the ten crisp ten-dollar bills that still lay uncared for on his desk.

A hundred thoughts now ran in quick succession through his brain.

"If I added this wrong, mightn't somebody else do the same? The deuce! They never go over my figures, anyway. That bookkeeper slaps down the total I give him and let's it go at that—I know he does. If I let that pay-roll stand at forty-four hundred instead of forty-three, as it should be, there's never a soul will know the difference. And even if I put it through at forty-three, there'll be no questions asked about the odd hundred—unless I tell them that I'm over. An auditor, of course, would catch it, but it will be a snowy day when this outfit thinks of calling in an auditor. Suppose I did take that neat little stack of bills?"

He really had no idea of taking them, but it invited his fancy to wonder what he would do with the money if it were his indeed. Again he started, as temptation in his mind assumed a concrete form.

That sum, added to what he had already saved, would just suffice to buy the golden bracelet his wife was expecting him to give her for Christmas.

They had seen it together in one of the Broadway shops. It was he, indeed, who had pointed it out to her, and told her how happy it would make him to see it on her round, white wrist.

She, on her part, was so captivated by the thing that she had urged him to pay a deposit to hold it till the time when he should have money enough to pay for it in full. This deposit he had made. Since that day she had asked him dozens of times if he would be able to purchase it outright by Christmas, and he had never had the heart to disappoint her hopes.

Nay, he had not had the courage to face the disappointment of his own hopes. For, if the truth were known, Gordon was probably more anxious to give than she to receive.

Gordon felt sick at heart as the realization sank in on him that it would be utterly impossible to buy the bracelet unless he did—

There he stopped; he no longer dared to think. Instinctively he turned for something with which to busy his hands, so that his mind might be kept free of the thoughts that clamored for entrance.

Instinctively, too, he hesitated about doing the one thing he should have done—put those ten bills out of his sight once and for all; perhaps he felt, subconsciously, that their fate had not yet been decided; perhaps he was afraid even to think of them, let alone touch them.

He did, however, store away the pay-envelopes of the men in the safe and locked the pay-roll in the drawer of his desk.

"Let's see," he mused, as the desk-lock clicked. "Guess I'm about through. Just three things more—put away that money, lock the safe, and out with the light."

He paused; and in that pause there suddenly rushed on him from nowhere the vivid fantom of a golden circlet, and a flash of yellow light blinded both his eyes and his soul.

Gordon did the three things that remained to be done, but not in the order he had calculated. The light went first, next the safe, and—

That was the first money James Gordon ever stole.

IV.

One summer afternoon in the year 187? a young man and a maid were walking among the trees that at that time clad the east bank of the Hudson in the upper part of the city. Over from the Palisades streamed a flood of orange and amber light.

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that came into this home to mar your life and mine.

"Perhaps you forget that first golden bracelet," he added in a tone that grew increasingly bitter, "but I never can."

Returning temper brushed from Mrs. Gordon's mind all thoughts of the opera.

"James Gordon, what is all this about, anyway? A thing you bought me nearly twenty years ago. This is a nice time to begrudge it to me—after I've tried my best all these years to do everything in my power to make home happy for you. Oh, I could do some casting-up, too, but I'm too decent. Why, you miserable, miserly wretch, a man with an income like yours ought to be proud and happy to reward such a wife as I have been with every means in his power. I've been too good for the likes of you!"

She stopped for breath. If she had expected this outburst to make any marked impression on her husband, she was disappointed. He sat like graven stone.

"Income!" was all he uttered, and that in an accent that seemed to mingle all the bitter emotions the human heart can know.

Mrs. Gordon's thoughts returned to the engagement for the evening.

"Jim," she ordered, "do be sensible. Are we going to the opera, or aren't we?"

"Perhaps," he returned, "perhaps, after all, we are not going." Then, half to himself: "They were at the office this afternoon; they'll probably be here to-night."

"They!" cried Mrs. Gordon, now vexed to the last extreme by this altered, inexplicable husband. "They! What 'they?'"

As if in answer to her question, there was a loud, long ring at the door. Next came the sound of heavy voices and of quick footsteps through the sounding hall.

Gordon calmly rose, and as the door burst open to reveal a uniformed policeman and a plain-clothes man, he stretched his bared wrists toward the intruders.

"I don't think handcuffs will be necessary," he said, "but if you think so, clap them on."

III.

"EIGHTY-SEVEN, ninety-four, a hundred and three, nine, twelve, twenty-one, twenty-five—twelve hundred and fifty-three dollars and seventy-four cents. If that isn't correct I'll eat the paper!"

Gordon was thinking aloud. He had just finished adding for about the tenth time the five sheets of the Universal Contracting Company's pay-roll.

It was not the Goldy Gordon of later years, the affluent president of the company, pompous in the pride of success achieved; but James Gordon, the young, honest, efficient, hard-working cashier and paymaster.

It should be said in passing, though, that the sobriquet of "Goldy" had already fastened to him. His somewhat ostentatious pride in two heavy gold rings, and particularly in the massive gold horseshoe that adorned his tie, had aroused sufficient comment among his coworkers to earn the nickname for him.

On this night, a December night in the late seventies, Gordon stood at his high desk, alone with his pay-roll, and the pay envelopes of the men. He was "over" in his cash—an even hundred dollars.

Not only had he added and readded the lists to find always the same total, but he had also taken each man's pay out of its envelope, checked it with the pay-roll, and returned it to the envelope again without discovering any discrepancy.

He was certain that the bank had not given him more money than he had called for; the bank's count and his had tallied. The mistake must be in his addition.

"If we only had an adding-machine," he muttered as he faced the lists again, "or some other means of checking this up."

An idea struck him. He took each sheet of the pay-roll separately and rearranged the figures on long strips of paper, thinking that he might catch some oft-repeated error of addition by varying the order of the factors. And on the third sheet he did catch it.

"Stupid!" he growled, when he had at last verified the new total to his utter satisfaction. "I've carried seventeen here, instead of sixteen, about forty times."

Throwing down his pencil, he heaved a long sigh of relief, and glanced up at the clock. Half-past eleven!

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tricate arabesque design, its innumerable curves, angles, surfaces, and facets shot dazzling spears of light above, about, below. On all the walls hung—not pictures, for one could not see the pictures for the frames—but golden picture-frames, inordinately massive, as poor in taste, perhaps, as they were rich in gilt.

On the spacious mantel, on the two or three tables, atop the bookcase, a variety of things golden vied for the privilege of confusing the beholder's sight—golden clocks, golden vases, golden statuettes, medallions, trays, card and ash receivers, bells, jardinières. Probably most of this splendor was gilt or plated, but a great deal of it was of the pure and solid metal.

In one corner stood a gilded curio-cabinet, a veritable storehouse of golden knick-knacks gathered from the ends of the earth. In this strange room even the knobs on the doors and the casters on the furniture were golden.

The man sitting in the midst of all this glitter did not himself escape the golden touch. A heavy golden seal dangled from his fob; obtrudingly large golden studs glistened on his immaculate shirt-bosom; some half-dozen broad gold rings encircled his slender fingers. This man was James Gordon. He sat deep in thought, his evident melancholy contrasting strangely with the bizarre dancing of the yellow lights. From time to time a fleeting expression of pain, of fear, even of despair, crossed his somber countenance.

Into the midst of his reverie suddenly burst Mrs. Gordon. His face assumed an iron calmness.

"Well, I have it on at last!" she cried. "Isn't it beautiful? Isn't it magnificent? Isn't it glorious?"

Gordon looked up mechanically to see his wife toss back her head in order to display to its best advantage his latest gift to her—a diamond tiara. He said not a word.

"Humph! don't you like it?" snapped Mrs. Gordon.

She was plainly hurt to see that her husband did not share her excited and almost childish delight in the new acquisition.

"I suppose you don't like it," she continued, "because for once in my life I've been able to get out of you something that I've really wanted, myself, instead of something to suit your taste. Of course, if you had had your way again, it would have been a golden this or a golden that, and I'd have thanked you very much for it, my dear, but people that are don't overweight themselves with heavy metals. They wear light, airy, sparkling things like this."

And here she gave her bejeweled head another little toss, this time with an added air of defiance.

Gordon did not appear to hear a word.

"Laura," he told her in a voice that was strangely slow and deliberate, "I have probably bought the last thing I shall ever buy you."

The calm, set expression on his face, the unusual tone of his voice, the unnatural import of his words, seemed to strike her like a physical force. Her flippancy of manner vanished.

"What do you mean?" she gasped. "What are you talking about?"

"I have been thinking while you were up-stairs," was his only response.

"You have been thinking!" she half-shrieked; for her temper was all-consuming when aroused. "You have been thinking again that I am altogether too extravagant a wife for so simple a creature as yourself, who are forever littering up the house with all sorts of yellow truck, which, of course, doesn't cost anything. You were going to tell me all about my extravagance again, and we were going to have another nice little quarrel such as we always have whenever I succeed, after months of the hardest kind of begging, in squeezing a few extra dollars out of your selfish self. I say we were going to have this quarrel, but we are not. We are going to the opera this minute. Get your hat, and for once try to look human!"

"Laura," Gordon responded in the same even tone, without moving a muscle save his lips, "I am too much of a man to blame you outright for the things that have been coming up in my mind while sitting here; yet I do wonder if everything would have gone just the same if I had never met you—especially if I had never listened to your persistent coaxing to buy the first trinket

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Goldy Gordon

by Harold Warner

A Tale Told Backward

I.

"THE sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children."

That were burden enough for the son of man to bear; but that the innocent joy of a mother should be visited upon her offspring as a heritage of wo—that would seem too cruel of fate to be possible. Yet there is the story of Goldy Gordon; you shall judge for yourself.

The last chapter of the sordid tale, which shall be the first in its narration, was embodied in a quarter-column in the New York *Star* a few weeks ago. Here it is:

GOLDY GORDON, ONCE WEALTHY, DIES IN COURT.

Adds Dramatic End to Career of Splendor, Crime and Misery.

James R. Gordon, better known in the height of his career as "Goldy" Gordon, died of heart failure last night in the Night Court. He had been arrested earlier in the evening on a charge of vagrancy.

Gordon figured in the newspapers about twenty years ago as the defendant in a criminal trial for the embezzlement of nearly a million dollars from the Universal Contracting Company, of which he was president at the time. He was found guilty and sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment.

Since his release, in 1912, at the age of sixty-two, he has been living in cheap lodging-houses, reduced to the last extreme of poverty and wretchedness. It appears that he has not been mentally sound for some years.

His death occurred under very dramatic circumstances. In the course of his examination the court attendant took from him a piece of twisted metal which seemed to have once been one of the covers of a gold watch. With almost hysterical emotion Gordon begged to have it back again.

"I must have it!" he cried; then, clutching at his heart, fell dead.

What significance attaches to the bit of metal is not known.

II.

ONE winter's night, about twenty years ago, a man, dressed for the opera, sat in the living-room of a brown-stone house on one of the side streets west of Central Park. He was waiting for his wife.

Had you entered the room at that time, you would have been impressed with the strangely brilliant yellow light that filled it, lending a seeming almost of solidity to the very air. You would soon have noticed that this brilliancy, far too great to be explained solely by the presence of the magnificent chandelier, was due to the reflections of its light from an endless array of golden and golden-hued objects disposed about the room.

The chandelier itself was unmistakably plated with pure gold, and, being of an in-

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and helped coach it; but he was not eligible to play. Through some tangle of red tape his formal reinstatement, although assured, had not yet been made, and he was consequently not a member of the corps.

Ah, was that all? The solution readily suggested itself. Across the field to the box of the Secretary of War hurried a dozen officers of high rank—generals in gold lace, commanders of departments, representatives of the general staff.

They made known what they wanted in a few words. One of them produced a fountain-pen and pressed it into the Secretary's hand. Another grabbed a reporter's note-book and thrust a sheet of paper in front of him.

The Secretary hesitated a moment, then scribbled a line and affixed his signature. And so Kerr Mosely again became a soldier of the United States.

The Navy raised a howl of protest; but the referee ruled against them, and Kerr rushed away to dress.

The record of that game, and the way the tide of disaster was turned to victory will long be sung whenever cadet voices are lifted in the strains of "Benny Havens."

As one sporting writer put it: "It was a tremendous exhibition of what the fire and dash and resolution of one man can do to a routed and disheartened team. It was a Sheridan's ride over again, only expressed in terms of football."

With four minutes still to play, and the score 15 to 12 in favor of the Navy, Kerr pulled off his most sensational stunt.

Catching the ball from a kick-off which had been necessitated by a foul, he ran 90 yards to the Navy's six-yard line, and irresistably plowing his way through an impeding bank of blue, made the touchdown and goal.

It was all over then but the shouting, and that as a matter of course followed swiftly, and continued until the hero of the occasion actually had to beg his exulting comrades to cease riding him on their shoulders.

The "game," and then the next great event on the West Point calendar is commencement.

June has come again, and in stately Cullum Hall the gray-haired Secretary of War is handing out diplomas to a hundred and fifty graduates.

"Cadet Mosely!"

A tumult of applause broke out which nearly brought the shot-torn battle-flags tumbling down from overhead. But Kerr broke away from the plaudits and congratulations, and the hearty slaps on the back, and went outside where Marian awaited him. They had two hours before their train and naturally their steps turned to Flirtation Walk. Then he asked:

"And you are perfectly satisfied now that I should remain in the army?"

"Perfectly satisfied that you will be a great man wherever you are. I don't want to play arbiter of destinies as you once said. I only want to love you—love you as wholly and sincerely as little Peach Blossom did"—with a little tremble in her voice—"for love, Kerr, is the greatest force in the world."

He drew her to him and kissed her rapturously.

"Yes," she repeated, "you will be a great man, Kerr; but also you will always be more or less of a boy. Still," she added fondly, "you will be my boy!"

(The End.)

HEART'S GARDEN

I BUILT a little wall about
The garden of my heart,
To bar intruders firmly out,
And keep it safe, apart.

Then, when the first intruder came
(I know it was a sin)
I went (I tell it you with shame)
Myself, and let him in!

Mary Carolyn Davies.

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He had no desire to see Queenie Sinclair drowned. Heaven could bear him witness to that. His feeling toward her was as impersonal as that of a man toward the earthquake which wrecks his house. But why—oh, why—must she resurrect herself at a moment to spell his ruin?

Farewell now to any hopes of returning to West Point. Farewell, likewise, to the continuance of his career in China. Worse than all, farewell to the dream of ever winning Marian Long.

He had seen her swift recoil at the revelation of Prince Chu, the look of aversion and contempt with which she regarded him. He would never be able to convince her that he acted innocently in the premises. She would always believe him a cheat and a deceiver.

"Oh," he groaned, "why did these cursed doctors pull me through? They say my recovery is a miracle. Why didn't they let me just sleep peacefully away, instead of waking me up to such an infernal muddle?"

And then he glanced up to see Marian Long approaching him with a look on her face such as he had never seen there before—a glow and a glory, "the light that was never on sea or land."

The trained nurse who had ushered her in, discreetly vanished. Probably it would have made no difference whether she remained or not.

Straight up to him Marian came and clasped her arms about him, crooning as a mother does over her baby.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," she whispered, "I have been such a fool. Forgive me, Kerr, and love me."

Presently, however, her story was all told—the recital of Queenie's confession, the appearance of Iguri, the patriotic outburst of the two "singed cats," the news from America that Tommy Wilburt had reported.

"We squabbled once, Kerr, because I was silly enough to think that you were throwing away your career by going back to become a soldier. But to-day, when I heard that little Mongolian taunting us with our inefficiency, I saw my mistake. We need all the trained men that we can get. And I say now, if you don't go back, I'll never marry you."

November again, and Thanksgiving time. A crowd at the polo grounds in New York which, for color and size and tensity of excitement and official recognition, can be matched on no other occasion.

It is the annual football contest between the Army and Navy teams. One one side of the great stadium are the massed forces of West Point, a solid block of palpitant gray. Across from them are the Middies, a splotch of blue against the banked up tiers of spectators.

Forty thousand spectators looking on, with everybody there from the President of the United States to the navy goat and the army mule. Flags and pennants waving by the thousands. The air a babel of shouts and concerted yells and songs and the clashing music of military bands.

And out of the gridiron the eleven lusty champions of each side battling against each with every ounce of force and cunning determination for the supremacy.

But that day things were going hard with the Army. Like an irresistible wave the Navy line had crashed into them again and again to bear them back, and now to add to the climax of a series of misfortunes, Ventable, the chief dependence of West Point, was so seriously injured just as the first half was ending that he had to be ordered out of the game.

The score stood 15 to 0 in favor of the Navy. Already the cold, chilling sense of certain defeat had gripped the ranks of gray. Their songs had lost their vim. Their taunts were lacking in spirit.

Then some inspired soul on the Army side of the field suddenly raised the cry:

"Mosely! Mosely! Give us Mosely!"

In an instant it was taken up all over the grounds. Ten thousand voices were chanting it, twenty thousand feet were stamping in time to the insistent refrain.

An eager, enthusiastic crowd gathered about Kerr, where he sat with Marian Long among the spectators. But he could only shake his head.

He was named as one of the substitutes of the teams, it was true, had trained with

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This slant-eyed monkey paid me to lay low, until he could use me to blow the ground from under Kerr. Moreover, it was him that set them bandits on you all, and him, too, that—"

In the excitement she was causing, no one had noticed the entrance of Tommy Wilburt. He stood a moment listening open-mouthed to her savage tirade, then pressed hurriedly forward.

"Here, here!" he interrupted. "What's all the row about? I've been looking for you everywhere, captain," and he turned to Iguri. "I picked up a piece of news that I guess will interest you. The Chinese annexation is off."

"The annexation off?" Iguri started violently. "What do you mean?"

"Well, the United States to-day, upon motion of Senator Mosely, has sent a protest against any such arrangement."

"Ah!" Marian drew a deep breath of relief. "That is what Phil has been working for at Washington, and he has won. He has won!"

"Yes," Tommy Wilburt shrugged his shoulders; "I guess that settles it." He veered again to Queenie. "But what was the rumpus you were having, Sinclair? You seemed to be chewing about all the scenery in sight."

"You bet I was!" she asserted vindictively. "And I'll do worse than that if he starts anything again. There ain't no chink on earth that can insult my flag."

"What?" The press-agent fairly bristled.

"That's what he done, Tommy. He knocked it down with his stick and called it a dirty rag."

Mr. Wilburt was of Irish blood, and the Irish, when their deeper sentiments are stirred, do not wait for apologies or explanations.

When the dust cleared away, Captain T. Iguri lay outside in a huddled heap at the foot of the stairway, and the former press-agent, slipping back into his coat, was purring with satisfaction over a duty well performed.

"Oh, Tommy, that was splendid!" exclaimed Miss Sinclair as she flung her arms admiringly about him.

Expatriates, castaways, the scum of humanity, these two. Yet there was one thing sacred to them—the flag of their country.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SOLDIER OF THE UNITED STATES.

THERE is a rickshaw boy who will not soon forget the woman passenger that hailed him as she emerged excitedly from a lodging-house in one of the more squalid quarters of the town and springing into his conveyance, drove him with cries of "Faster! Faster!" all the way to the big hospital fronting on the Bund.

The Chinese are not an imaginative race; they accept things impassively as they come without much speculation. The rickshaw boy noted the lady chiefly because she was not of the type he expected to pick up in the district where he found her, because she was in such a tearing hurry, and because she leaped out and rushed into the hospital without stopping to pay him.

Following her inside to collect his fare, he found her talking with the jovial, red-faced, Scotch surgeon in charge.

"Aye, Miss Long," he heard the doctor say, "he's full himsel' once mair, and 'twill do him good to speir wi' you. Go right on up. A braw lad like that mends on what would throw another back into a relapse."

Then, as the rickshaw boy made his presence known, he found another cause to remember the lady, for she thrust into his hand a bill which would almost have covered the rickshaw fare for a trip around the entire Chinese empire. How was he to know that it was merely the expression of a life, and love, and hope which at full tide that moment embraced all the universe in its gratitude.

Up-stairs, in his bandages, Kerr Mosely, just emerged from the mists of unconsciousness and, beginning to remember, was growing gloomier and gloomier every minute as he reviewed the outlook.

So the impulsive folly of that night two years before had bobbed up again to discredit and defeat him!

Of what use to struggle or try to build himself up? he questioned resentfully. He seemed doomed to go on forever blundering.

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do, the Long Combination neither pays for nor submits to blackmail."

"Very wisely so in the present instance," he dismissed her fling at his own methods with an airy wave of the hand. "Very wisely so, since you would simply have been throwing money away. The marital complications of Mr. Kerr Mosely, let me inform you, no longer cut any figure in the situation; for I have just completed an arrangement with Prince Chu"—a note of unconcealed triumph crept into his voice—"whereby under the new regime the entire development of the Shansi will be directed and controlled by my company. The Long Combination must simply evacuate the field."

Marian stared at him half-dazedly. Were all her brother's cherished dreams to end thus in defeat; was all the work and planning and energy and sacrifice that had been put into this great enterprise to go for naught; was all Kerr Mosely's labor and efficiency to count only for the benefit of his rival?

She was staggered, overwhelmed for a moment by the catastrophe; but as she saw Iguri's vaunting leer, she threw up her head and struggled hard to hold her self-control.

"Score one for your side," she rejoined gamely. "But Uncle Sam is not dead, Captain Iguri, even though he seems to be sleeping. Some day his sons will exact a reckoning, and Kerr Mosely will be one of those to do it."

"Kerr Mosely?" Iguri gave a sneering laugh. "You forget that his military career ended when he married his charming wife here."

"Never think it," Marian contended stoutly. "He is going back to take it up where he left off. His marriage, as you know, was no marriage at all. Why, she herself," with a wave of the hand toward Queenie, "has confessed to me that she was already the wife of another man."

"Lies, pure lies," he scoffed. "Merely a ruse to extort money from you. Is it not so, my beauty?" He let his gaze rest for a moment on the trembling chorus-girl. "You were deceiving the lady, were you not?"

Again Queenie cringed under that look as at the crack of a whip.

"That's—that's right," she gulped apprehensively. "It's all straight. Me and Kerr was spliced strictly on the level. I was just fooling about that other husband."

"You see," Iguri grinned maliciously, "I think that Mr. Mosely will have some difficulty in securing that reappointment to West Point."

"Ah, but our soldiers do not come entirely from West Point," Marian cried with spirit. "Let the call be made for fighting men, and I am very sure that Kerr Mosely would be at the front, even though it were only as a private. And," she added, as the words recurred to her of a song which she had heard in New York, "there are a hundred million others like him."

"Bah!" Iguri jeered. "An untrained, undisciplined mob. What can they do? We will crumple them up and toss them aside as I do this rag."

He raised his light, Malacca walking-stick as he spoke and struck down with it at a small American flag which hung from Queenie's chandelier.

But before he could commit any further desecration of the emblem, the chorus girl springing forward snatched the cane from his hand, and, snapping it in two, flung the pieces in his face. No mother, in defense of her child, could have shown more furious resentment.

"Don't you touch that flag again, you yellow-faced rat," she shrieked. "You lay another finger on it and I'll tear your eyes out. You can understand, too, that all bets between me and you is off now and forever. I've taken your money, and I've done your dirty work, but I'm through. And you can't shut me up with threats neither, not if you turn your whole gang of murdering high-binders loose on me. From this time on I'll stand by my own colors and my own country, even if I die for it."

"I'm going to talk!" She flung out her arms wildly. "What I told you, ma'am, was the straight truth, s'elp me, and nothing but the truth. I was a married woman when I tied up to Kerr Mosely, and here"—again resorting to her chamois bag—"is a certificate from Erie, Pa., to prove it.

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"And you say, you can get around this?"

"Sure I can," Queenie boasted. "I can knock a hole in it big enough to drive an elephant through, I tell you."

Marian's manner of questioning and uncertainty suddenly changed.

"Then," she flashed the quick accusation, "there is but one explanation. You had been previously married."

At the unexpected thrust, Queenie recoiled, her face convulsed, her eyes glaring widely at the thought of having been trapped. Then she recovered herself and forced a scornful laugh.

"Some smooth lady, ain't you?" she sneered. "But that sort of dope won't get you nothing, sister. Let's see you prove it. Old man Mosely raked the country with a fine-tooth comb to find something against me, and after he'd used all his money and all his influence, the best he could do was to come to our terms and arrange for an annulment."

"An annulment?" Marian broke in. "Kerr's father agreed to that?"

"Sure; he knew it was all a frame-up, but when he found he couldn't do nothing else, he was willing to stand the gaff and unbelt all right. Gee, I have to laugh sometimes yet to think how easy they all was."

She recounted with reminiscent pride the manner in which the wedding had been brought about, and the subsequent successful negotiations with the elder Mosely for a settlement.

It threw a flood of light for Marian upon the problem of what sort of a man Kerr Mosely was, a problem with which she had been so vexing herself.

"But if this annulment was all arranged as you say," she cried perplexedly, "why was it never carried out?"

"Oh, that was because Kerr had to play the second George Washington. They asked him about it up to West Point, and he could not tell a lie."

"And he let the matter stand then?" Marian asked. "He never took any steps on his own account?"

"Sure not. Why should he? He knew about the Cecropia being sunk, of course, and he thought I was with McGinty down at the bottom of the sea.

"But, say," Queenie interrupted herself; "here I am spilling a lot of ancient history, instead of 'tending to the till. Let's get back to our fried potatoes, sister. S'posing just for argument that the guess you made is right? S'posing there is another friend husband that can be rung in to put the kibosh on this mees-alliance? Well, as I tell you, it's something you can't never prove by yourself. Believe me, little one, you'd get gray-headed before you traced me up through all the different names I've used, and in all the different places I've been.

"No," she shrilled triumphantly; "you gotta have me. And I've gotta have mine before I let out a peep, see. So here's my terms. You square old man Mosely, so that I can show my face on Broadway again, and pay me $50,000 cash, and I'll—"

She checked herself abruptly with a half-terrified gasp, and her face, even under its thick layer of rouge, went a pasty green. Following the direction of her frightened eyes, Marian saw standing in the doorway Captain T. Iguri.

Slowly he advanced into the room, his gaze bent upon poor Queenie all the time in a blandly malevolent smile.

"So you are trying to deal with the other side, eh, my beauty?" he said in his suave, even tones. "You were preparing to give me what in your honorably expressive language is termed the 'double-cross'?"

The woman cringed like a spaniel before the whip of its master.

"I—I—" she started to falter. But he turned contemptuously from her stammering excuses.

"And you, *mademoiselle*," he bowed to Marian. "You will pardon I trust this intrusion upon what appears to be a business conference?"

Marian threw up her head haughtily as she faced him.

"No apologies are necessary, sir. Your appearance makes absolutely no difference to me. I came here to find out something, and I have succeeded. As for the offer you heard this woman making, I was just about to refuse it. Whatever other concerns may

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elucidated, as she noted the blank look on her visitor's face.

"Neither of 'em, eh?" she continued mockingly. "Then you must be another dame that's fell for them broad shoulders and soft speeches of his'n. Poor kid, I guess he just can't help it. It's the same way with every skirt he runs across. He had me believing wunst that I was the only thing on earth, too."

"You are quite wrong," Marian spoke with some asperity. "My interest in Mr. Mosely is solely of a business character."

"Oh, sure," sneered Queenie.

"He is acting manager for my brother's mining operations in the Shansi," Marian explained, ignoring the sarcasm; "and naturally when we find that his—when we find that the coupling of his name with ours is affecting our arrangements, we want to know something about it."

A calculating gleam slid into Miss Sinclair's eye.

"Affecting your arrangements?" she questioned sharply. "Now, just what do you mean by that?"

Marian considered a moment.

"Why should we mince words?" she said at last. "Unless his alleged marriage to you can be disproved or explained, Mr. Mosely will be forced to leave China."

"And that is going to cost you money, eh?"

Queenie had leaned forward in her chair. Her assumption of nonchalance was all gone.

"Well, it would hamper and delay us enormously," conceded Marian, "even if it didn't entirely wreck the enterprise. But I am not speaking solely from selfish motives," she added. "There is Mr. Mosely also to be considered. He has made wonderfully good out here, and has brilliant prospects of an even greater success. To go now, especially under a cloud, would practically blast his career."

The chorus girl dismissed this phase of the question with an impatient shrug of her shoulders. There was little room for altruism in her soul. She was thinking solely of herself, and she lost no time in making her object plain.

"S'pose we can the 'me noble boy' stuff," she suggested cynically, "and come down to cases. You say, you want that there Georgian knot 'tween me and Kerr removed—wiped clean off the slate? All right. How much are you willing to pay for it?"

"You mean that this marriage can be disproved?" Marian demanded. "Not merely set aside, or annulled, but shown as fraudulent and invalid from the start?"

Miss Sinclair nodded an assent.

"Ah!" Marian sprang excitedly to her feet. "I knew it was so. I knew it all the time. Now, tell me, where is the flaw?

But the other woman saw that she had gone a shade too fast.

"Hold on there," she countered warily. "I haven't said that this was any phony deal. I said that it could be showed up that way—for a consideration.

"Here," she jerked a little, chamois-skin bag from her bosom, and drew out a folded, discolored paper; "this is my wedding certificate. Put it up to anybody you want to, and if they can find that flaw you're talking about, I'll eat it.

"No, ma'am," waving the paper as if in challenge; "I'm Kerr Mosely's lawful, wedded wife all right, and there ain't no getting away from it so long as I stick by the facts. But"—and she cast a sidelong, significant glance at Marian—"I'm a business woman same as you are, and if 'twas made worth my while, I might not stick."

Marian pretended to consider.

"Do you mind letting me see that certificate for a moment?" she asked. But, although Queenie readily handed it over, Marian paused distastefully before opening it, as if she had to nerve herself to its perusal.

Carried over half the world through months of wandering, it was creased and wrinkled, and stained by the sea water which penetrated its chamois covering when the Cecropia went down; but it was still decipherable, and so far as Marian could see, absolutely impregnable.

She raised a dubious glance from it to Miss Sinclair, who was watching her cautiously, ready to snatch the paper if there should be any attempt to destroy it.

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speedy recovery. And this assurance, oddly enough, had aroused a fierce combat in Marian's soul.

Hitherto, she had been like one stunned, scarcely able to think, in her pity and solicitude for him; but now at the word that he would get well, coupled with her relief and gladness, there awoke that sense of poignant resentment she had felt at the moment of Prince Chu's revelation.

Her injured pride rose up to remind her that he had deceived and imposed upon her, had pleaded for her love and had allowed her to confess a love for him when all the time he knew he was not in honor free to speak or to accept.

With her as with Chu Sing, she told herhelf, he had never been frank and open. Probably he had simply been amusing himself with them both, trying to add fresh scalps to his string in that cadet belief of his, that all girls were susceptible.

And she had yielded to his wiles, had bared her heart to this conceited flirt, and had let him know that she cared.

Her cheeks burned hot at the recollection of her avowal. She clenched her hands, and rising, paced the floor at the thought of having pandered to his smug complacency.

Then in a swift revulsion of feeling her mind reverted to that heroic, self-sacrificing defense of his against the bandits, to the chivalry he had shown, to his magnificent qualities of leadership.

Could two such different men live in one skin; and if so, which was the real Kerr Mosely?

One moment as she remembered his valor and gallantry, she was ready almost to worship him; the next, with the thought of his heartless philandering, she despised and hated him.

And then on top of this, there came another complication. Her brother cabled from the United States, that he was detained by matters at Washington, and that it would be absolutely impossible for him to come out to China until the last of August.

This meant that Kerr, immediately upon his recovery must reassume charge of the work, and continue at it until the arrival of Phil. In such a disturbed and uncertain time, no lesser man would do. Yet Kerr, as she knew, was practically under sentence of banishment. Prince Chu expected him to take the first steamer that his condition warranted.

With Marian, the success of her brother's scheme always came first. She had determined never to see Kerr Mosely again after his recovery of consciousness. She would let him go from China, and close the book upon the story of their acquaintance.

But now that the enterprise required him, she made up her mind, although it would entail frequent conferences between them and a more or less intimate association, that he must stay.

Somehow she must manage to moderate the stern hostility of Prince Chu. But how? That was the question.

Then in a sudden flash of clearer vision came the suggestion of quizzing Queenie Sinclair. There, she was certain, lay the key to the solution of the whole vexing problem.

How she knew this, it is futile to speculate. A woman never asks herself how she reaches a certain conclusion; she simply trusts to her intuitions.

Yet now that she had come, Marian found herself at an absolute loss what to say. She and Queenie Sinclair, she realized, were as far apart as the poles. There was no common ground upon which they could meet. Between them yawned an impassable gulf of mutual antagonism and prejudice.

Still it was necessary to say something; she must give some reason or explanation for her visit. The other woman, recognizing that she had all the advantage of the situation, was looking at her with derisive insolence from under her painted lids, and roused by the challenge, Marian decided her best policy was to strike straight at the mark.

"Miss Sinclair," she said coldly, "I have come to ask you a few questions in regard to Kerr Mosely."

"Ah?" Queenie took a puff at her cigarette. "Census taker are you, or a she-dick? Female detective, I mean," she

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A Soldier's Honor

by Captain S. S. Harrington

Author of "Breaking Into West Point," "Rosalind and the Forty Thieves," etc.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FLAG OF THEIR COUNTRY.

IT was about three weeks later that Queenie Sinclair, lounging one afternoon in a slatternly kimono with a cigarette between her fingers, was startled by the announcement that a visitor desired to see her.

"Miss Long," she spelled out the name upon the card which the wrinkled, parchment-faced "boy" presented to her. "One of them missionary soul-savers, I guess, that's always pestering around to bother one.

"Oh, well," she stifled a yawn, "it's somebody to talk to anyhow, that ain't a chink. Show her up, John."

Truth to tell, she was in such a desperately blue and homesick mood that afternoon that she was ready to welcome almost any diversion, even to being lectured on the error of her ways by some "hick dame from Oskaloosa what thinks wearing silk stockings is a sure sign you're bound for perdition."

But the slender, exquisite girl who appeared a moment or two later in her perfectly-tailored pongee suit was far from the type Queenie had expected to see.

With one swift glance from under her heavily-darkened lids, she took in every detail of her visitor's get-up.

"Now what is she after?" she questioned mentally, as she sank back hostile and on guard.

Marian, meanwhile, with a similar appraising glance had noted the lined, rouged face of the other woman, her slippers run down at the heel, the slovenliness of her attire, and the general disorder and untidiness of her surroundings. The air was thick with the mingled odor of cigarettes and some peculiarly pervasive, cheap scent.

She had come there on a sudden impulse—a "hunch" it would have been called in sporting circles—but now as she realized the sort of person with whom she had to cope, she half-regretted her hasty and unconsidered action.

During those last three weeks Kerr Mosely, brought on first to Peking and then to Shanghai, had been hovering between life and death. Not until the day before had the doctors in attendance given a definite hope that, with his rugged constitution and sturdy vitality, he would pull through.

Now, although he still lay weak and unconscious on his narrow, hospital cot, there had been a decided change for the better, and they were confidently predicting his

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had returned, for he disappeared as mysteriously as he had come, so Mary's secret was safe. A circular would have landed him in no time, but I had to let him go. It was best so, we thought.

"As to how he did it, the barn floor was all wet, and footprints showed where Joe'd been walking back and forth in a line running from the big door over to the middle of the line of stalls. The only other footprints were a few near an open window in the corner where the loose hay was. Those footprints were Aaron's.

"The bullet entered Joe's back at an angle of about forty-five degrees, so the medical examiner said; but that meant nothing special to him. To me it meant a great deal. It placed the bullet as coming from the pile of hay in the corner, just where, twenty-five years later, Aaron Waterbury was found dead, killed by our prisoner, the son of Joe Hutchinson, the child against whose coming he had raged. So maybe you'll admit now that Aaron owned the pistol that was found with his body."

Mr. Gibbs looked from face to face with a self-satisfied grin. He was greatly pleased at the affect his narrative had created.

"That's about all," he said, his grin broadening. "When I show you daylight I ain't supposed to tell you what it is. But rest assured that if William hadn't shot as he was entering the barn he'd never have lived to kill another muskrat."

"Well, I know daylight when I see it, I guess," spoke up Juror Number Six. "Aaron had removed the father very handily, and he was there to remove the son. And what a day the villain chose! The day before the young man's wedding! Good Lord! He must have waited for it just so as to make the blow fall harder."

"Correct all the way," replied Mr. Gibbs. "Happiness in the Hutchinson family didn't meet with Aaron's approval."

"Do you mean that William's story is true, or that he had learned his mother's story and used to shoot into the hay just sort of wishing Aaron was there?" asked the foreman.

"I mean that William's story is true," replied Mr. Gibbs. "He never knew his mother's story, and doesn't now."

"How do you account for his delusion concerning muskrats in the hay?"

"I ain't accounting for the ways of Providence."

"Gentleman," said the foreman, rising from his chair, "Mr. Gibbs has told us a very interesting story, but I've clean forgotten what it was about. Now let's get down to business. One of you suggested a short delay, and we've made it. It's time for a verdict. I for one am convinced that the holes in the boarding are bullet holes, and that therefore the young man's story is true. It was a queer habit he had, but he had it. Gentlemen, do we all agree?"

Eleven voices answered.

THE PARTS OF SPEECH

THE pronoun said:
"You'll find it true
The world is made
Of me and you."

The noun proclaimed:
"From me all springs;
The world in truth
Consists of things."

The verb announced:
"'Tis plain to see
What makes the world
Is just to be."

Conjunction cried:
To end the tiff:
"You'll find the world
All hangs on if!"

McLandburgh Wilson.

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before. Mary knew it long before he did—knew that her madness had been only madness, not love, and that here was her man.

"She didn't know what to do. She didn't want to hurt him by refusing him, and besides that, the poor girl wanted him. She loved him with the love that makes a woman wise, not foolish.

"She wouldn't marry him without telling him, and she couldn't bear to tell. So she put him off. And after a while she up and tells my Jule the whole sorrowful business. Jule was the one elected to tell him, and to get from him a promise that he'd never mention it to Mary. The poor child wanted to forget it all. Jule did the job as only a woman can. I was at the wedding—helping Jule.

"Not long after that wedding, Waterbury's father died. He didn't leave any property worth coming after, yet it strikes me as a little queer that both events failed to bring Aaron home. Both were widely mentioned in the newspapers. Maybe he wasn't getting the news while it was still fresh. I doubt he's always been free.

"It was one night about two years after the wedding of Joe Hutchinson and Mary, and only a little while after Jule and me was married, that Mary came running over to our house wild and hysterical. It took a long time for Jule to find out what the trouble was. Aaron, bearded and changed almost beyond recognition, had risen from the dead.

"Mary wasn't well, then, and didn't go about much. Every evening she used to take a long walk about the orchard, generally on Joe's arm; but this time Joe wasn't there. Aaron had stepped out to her from behind a tree. How he taunted her I ain't going to repeat, nor the things he called her.

"He had come to take her away with him, so when he saw how things were, he was furious. He raged against the child she was expecting as much as he did against herself and Joe.

"She never spoke to him once, just waited till he let her go. Then she hurried to Jule.

"Now, there wasn't much danger of his denouncing the poor child, because he knew that the Hutchinsons had money with which to trace his career step by step the world over. But from his still caring for her, if you call it caring, we knew that he was a force to be reckoned with.

"Jule comforted her as best she could, and went home with her. Together they told Joe, and there was such taking on that Jule made them hang up the whole subject until morning. She tucked Mary into bed, and stayed with her all night. Joe's parents weren't in on the secret. They just thought that Mary was sick.

"Now, it was always Joe's custom to go out to the stable and cow-barn at night to see that things were right, and with all his troubles he went that night. Maybe he just wanted to get away from the house and be by himself. Naturally he didn't feel like sleeping any.

"In the morning Joe's mother came into the room where Mary and Jule were, and then she went down-stairs to help the girl that had Jule's old place. Pretty soon she came back with some breakfast for Mary.

"'Where's Joe?' she says.

"'We don't know,' says Jule. 'Where did he sleep?'

"'I told him to sleep in his old room,' says the mother, 'but the bed ain't been slept in.'

"There was some scurrying then. 'Twas Joe's father, the original owner of the place, and our prisoner's grandfather, that found him—dead.

"Mary knew who had done it, and she went out of her head for a while. Jule stuck to her every minute. The poor girl's own parents were off to Chicago visiting their son. The secret was kept because William was coming.

"Men, you know that I was town marshal then, and you know why I had to fire the job. But I had done pretty well on the case for all that—well enough to have sent Aaron Waterbury to the gallows.

"I had his footprints in the orchard, and—well, wait a while.

"You see how my tongue was tied. No, I didn't do my duty, but I paid—with my job. But God has stood by me in worldly things, so I think he must have approved.

"Only the three of us knew that Aaron

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Mr. Gibbs waved a hand commanding silence.

"I thought you'd be a little surprised. Few knew of it even at the time, and it was all over before the gossips had a chance.

"Well, as I said, Waterbury came nosing around. Joe Hutchinson, who afterward became her husband, if God ever joined a couple, was brought up so near to her, and they'd been such playmates from babyhood that it never entered their heads in those days that they loved each other. She treated Joe like a dearly loved brother. But with Waterbury it was mighty different.

"One night when I was in the kitchen with my Jule, she up and tells me about it. And say! That seemed to settle it in my mind.

"Yes, sir, for he was the handsomest, most taking cuss, so oily with his tongue when he wanted to be, and he was chiseled out as though it was done to make women act foolish. You know women.

"Waterbury hadn't joined the candidates, he had just stepped in ahead of them. Mary acted just like his face was made to make girls act.

"She couldn't help talking about him, poor girl. She was confiding by nature. Men, she was the daintiest, tenderest thing that ever stirred a man to villainy.

"Without seeming to realize that she was laying bare her feelings, she confided every thought in her mind to her mother, letting the mother see how things stood. When her mother, the prisoner's grandmother, tried to make her see what everybody else could see without trying—well, you know how it is with girls. She believed him. Whenever Mrs. Callendar 'd point out some black spot in his career, Mary 'd take it to him. He'd paint it white, and then she'd bring it back to her mother.

"Finally the mother and father got their heads together, and Mary got some plain orders about having no more to do with him. What little welcome he had at the house was revoked with a bang.

"There ain't one of you here that couldn't guess the next chapter, now, I suppose. The girl was way out of her head about the chap, and dead certain that her parents would some day realize what a paragon he was. They were successful in keeping the wedding secret. It may have been genuine, but I doubt it. Mary never knew the name of the village where it took place."

Mr. Gibbs paused to light his pipe. At the pause eleven deep breaths were taken, and eleven pairs of eyes were withdrawn from Mr. Gibbs to look exclamatory things at each other. After a few puffs, Mr. Gibbs went on:

"About a month after the wedding, old Joel Tabor shot at Waterbury. You remember the Tabor scandal, some of you—the shooting case that was not pressed. The Tabor girl drowned herself a few weeks later.

"That was when poor Mary began to open her eyes. She evaded him as long as she could, but one day he caught up with her. She spurned him, and the cuss threatened to expose her. When she taxed him with his infidelity, he denied everything, and told her that, say what she would, she belonged to him, and that he was going to claim her soon. He was going away, so he told her; but he was coming back for her.

"Things were looking pretty hot for Aaron about then. You see, he knew that the two Tabor boys were after him, and he knew that they intended to get him when things were right, saving their own necks.

"So he borrowed some money from his father and vamosed. Luckily for him that he lit out before the girl drowned herself. They'd have killed him on sight. His father didn't know anything about the loan at the time—not being looking.

"It was just about a year later that news came of the steamship Napoleon going down off Cherbourg. According to report every soul on board was lost, and Aaron's name was among them. His father investigated through the American consul at Cherbourg, and that seemed to settle it. Aaron was picked up somehow, but he didn't take the trouble to write home saying so.

"All this time Joe Hutchinson had been playing the devoted brother; but by and by something seemed to tell him all of a sudden what he should have known long

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Gibbs intently. No one spoke; all were waiting.

"Now, men, you recollect that there was a pistol with all the chambers loaded found in the hay beside Aaron's body. The defense failed to prove that that pistol belonged to Aaron. The State insinuated that it had been placed there by the prisoner. We'll see. Just keep that pistol in mind. And next, tell me if what goes on in this jury-room is going to remain secret. If"—there was a quaint twinkle in Mr. Gibbs's eyes now—"if I smooth your future pillows for you by—by sort of casting a shadow over a good woman's name, do you promise to bite your tongues off before you'll let them betray what I'm going to tell you?"

"Anything you say, Gibbs, you may regard as forgotten by me the moment we leave this jury-room," assured the foreman.

"Me, too," and other concurring exclamations followed.

Mr. Gibbs's face was a study. Grim determination was plainly written there, but there was something else—something akin to humor.

"Fiendish, now, wasn't it?" he began ruminatively. "The idea of killing a man and hiding his body in a pile of hay. Still, Herrick made some good points. He dwelt finely on the point that the State could dig up no sign of a motive. He wanted to know where the man was killed if not in the hay. He pointed out that there was no sign of blood except in the hay, and that there was no sign of a scuffle or of anything being dragged toward the hay pile. Those are the mysteries of the case. Maybe we'll solve them all in a few minutes."

The jurors, sensing the irony in Mr. Gibbs's voice, shifted uneasily in their chairs. They were mystified and eager. Gibbs, seeming to enjoy their impatience, continued with tantalizing indirection.

"It strikes me that if I'd killed a man and hidden his body where no one could see it, unless they looked, I'd get up a decent story about it. And Hutchinson is such a smart young chap! Don't it strike you as funny that he put up such a flimsy yarn? Still, it ain't flimsy if it's true, is it? Many a man has died for telling the truth when a whale of a lie would have saved his neck. Maybe he'll be another of them. But then, maybe he won't."

The eleven listeners, realizing at length that Mr. Gibbs was poking fun at the majority, made no further effort to conceal their impatience.

"Let's have it, Gibbs," snapped the foreman.

"I'm beginning to feel it coming," said Mr. Gibbs quietly.

"Now, to begin at the beginning, do you know that when I was summoned for this jury I never expected to serve? No, sir! I expected objections from all sides. Not because of my connection with the unsolved mystery of William's father's murder, but for quite another reason.

"I intended all along to offer myself as a witness, but when I was passed for the jury, I saw that that was my best chance. If I told it on the witness-stand the poor boy might thank me precious little for saving his life. So I was mighty glad to get on the jury. Maybe there was a reservation or two in the oath I took, but the Lord 'll understand. He knows that I can't decide solely upon the evidence presented."

"I remember, now," said Juror Number Four suddenly. "Your wife used to work for the Callendar's."

"Correct, first time," said Mr. Gibbs. "It was at Callendar's house that I courted my Jule. And at the same time every young chap in the county that thought himself good enough was trying to court Mary Callendar, the unhappy child who later became the mother of our prisoner.

"But none of them got much encouragement, fine as some of them were, until—" Mr. Gibbs's eyes narrowed here as he looked from face to face. Mr. Gibbs never sought the center of the stage, but circumstances having forced that prominence upon him, he wished to make his sensation as explosive as possible—"until that fiend in human form, that arch-devil out of Hades, that yellow, yellow cur called Aaron Waterbury came along," he finished dramatically.

"Well, I'll be—" began Juror Number Six before the others had recovered from their surprise.

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As it was, only one halo shone. Even the dullest clod could see it in that brief instant when she had raised her veil and her white, saintlike face told its story of martyrdom.

The judge charged the jury with a mathematical precision that left no doubt in the minds of the twelve men concerning the evidence, the law, or their duty to the State. His last word left the court-room in an awesome silence. At a signal the jurymen arose and solemnly filed from view.

When the door of the jury-room closed upon the twelve grim-faced men, one of them, Juror Number Six, took a cigar from his pocket.

"I don't know about that," objected Juror Number Four. "Going to take time over it? What for? Ain't we been here long enough? I want to get home to my family."

"Oh, don't be in such a hurry," returned Juror Number Six, slowly lighting his cigar. "Young Hutchinson was a mighty popular chap. And Waterbury was a skunk."

"A muskrat," interjected Juror Number Nine.

"Besides, Herrick got in some pretty fair licks," went on Juror Number Six.

"Well, what of that?"

"Oh, nothing, only I think it would look sort of decent for us to take an hour or so over it. We needn't deliberate any, but folks can think what pleases them best. What's the good of rushing out there and shouting, 'Guilty,' as though we enjoyed it?"

The foreman drew out his pipe and lighted it.

"Good idea!" he said. "But there ain't much need of discussing the case. I, for one, am sick of it all. I suppose we all agree?"

The foreman's whole attention was being bestowed on his pipe. He wasn't worrying about the answers to his question. But when ten men had expressed themselves in the affirmative, some by scoffing contemptuously at the absurdity of the question, some as a matter of course, some with tears in their eyes, the pipe suddenly ceased to be so all-engrossing.

The man who had not spoken was Juror Number Nine, the one who a moment before had called Aaron Waterbury a muskrat. He was sitting next to the foreman. The foreman looked quickly toward him. Juror Number Nine looked the foreman steadily in the eyes. It was a thoughtful, not a hostile gaze. The foreman arched his brows.

"I ain't sure whether or not we agree—just yet," spoke Juror Number Nine with an air that was more cryptic than solemn.

Several of the jurors laughed, but seeing the jaws of Juror Number Nine tighten, one of them questioned him.

"What's wanting, Gibbs?"

Uriel Gibbs seemed too deeply occupied with some big problem to answer at once.

"What's the matter, I say? Don't he admit the killing?"

"Like a man!"

"What? You swallow that cock and bull story? What in Topheth would Aaron Waterbury be doing in that pile of hay?"

"There ain't any use in getting excited," came the unruffled admonition. "We'll agree all right in the end, I guess. The judge says that a small minority ought to pay heed to the opinion of a large majority, and that's sound sense.

"Now, I'm a very small, if somewhat bulky minority, and I don't know 's I'm vain enough to hold out against eleven men. So don't worry about our not agreeing. I ain't going to haggle with you. I'm just going to relieve your minds, that's all.

"You see, you're in a serious fix, you chaps. You're about to recommend a rope for a man because you believe part of his story—the part in which he admits the killing. You don't believe the rest of his story. You convict mainly on his testimony, and at the same time you discredit him for a liar.

"Of course, you're only doing your duty as you see it. But my idea is that, owing to this point, future doubts might arise in your minds and spoil your sleep when you need it most. That ain't a pleasant prospect for any man. So the yarn I'm going to spin 'll be about as good a lullaby as you ever heard."

The jurors, all seated now, regarded Mr.

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of the trial. Persistently the people had hoped, they knew not for what. The prisoner had not altered in the slightest degree his original explanation of the shooting.

The Hutchinson pasture, which was low, marshy land, was infested by muskrats, so he testified. For that reason it had been his custom to carry a pistol when in that vicinity. The barn was at the edge of the marsh. In a corner of the barn there was usually to be seen a pile of loose hay. It was an old custom at the barn for the hired men to fork down each evening the supply for the next day. Occasionally he had discharged his pistol into the hay.

"What was your reason for shooting into the hay?" questioned the district attorney.

"I always had an idea that muskrats might be in it," was the answer. "I often shot into it. That was what shattered the boarding in that corner."

"Do you wish the jury to understand that Aaron Waterbury was hiding in your hay, and that you shot unknowing that he was there?"

"That is the truth. The moment I entered the barn I suspected that something was moving in the hay. I thought that at last I had caught a muskrat there."

"Did any one ever see you shoot into that hay?"

"Only my mother. She saw me do it once, and she appeared all upset. She may have thought it queer. It didn't seem at all queer to me, and doesn't now. There may never have been a muskrat there, but I often felt sure that there was."

"Upon learning that you had killed a man, why did you not notify the proper authorities?"

"I went first to my mother. The shock to her was so great that I had to remain with her until some one else arrived. We have no telephone. The hired girl was not in the house. It was she who discovered the body. Her screams attracted the farm-hands and others.

"No one questioned or suspected me. When the marshal arrived at the barn he sent the hired girl to notify me of what had happened. I sent for the marshal and told him the whole truth. I asked him for a few hours' respite, and he detailed two constables to remain with me until my mother was taken to the hospital where a week later she died.

"The body was discovered at about one o'clock in the afternoon, and it was five o'clock before I was taken from my house, but my confession to the marshal was made at about one fifteen. I did not try to evade arrest. I had no fear, being perfectly sure of prompt release. I had nothing to conceal, and haven't now."

The district attorney shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

Herrick, the counsel for the defense, made a brilliant effort under the trying circumstances, but succeeded only enhancing his own reputation.

All his skill had been brought to bear toward the discrediting of those witnesses who, as experts, testified that the alleged bullet holes in the boarding were worm-holes and ordinary breaks in the decayed wood near the damp ground. The jury viewed the boarding both before and after the taking of the expert testimony.

In a corner of the court-room on that last day, as on every day of the trial, sat Mildred Page, betrothed of William Hutchinson. She was heavily veiled, but most of those present knew of the beauty thus hidden.

Bewilderment had been her portion since the news of the tragedy had first been conveyed to her, yet in all her bewilderment her fidelity had never wavered. Fidelity bears no weight in the rebutting of evidence, but the girl's blind faith in the integrity of her affianced had touched every heart, and it had counted heavily in Herrick's final argument, at the close of which his auditors held their breaths in admiration.

In describing the prisoner's character and antecedents, and in picturing the blighted future of the young woman in case of the conviction of her betrothed, the lawyer had expressed no more than the feelings of the humblest person present, yet in glorifying periods that would have drawn halos around both young heads had the evidence against the young man been less damning, or had his story been more plausible.

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thing occurred. Was there any connection between the horrible thing that came to pass and the idyllic thing that now might never be?

His mother, never robust since the day of her son's birth, had died demented within a week of the dreadful happening. Had she, too, found it impossible to believe her son?

The body had been found in a pile of loose hay in a corner of the cow-barn, within thirty feet of where, twenty-five years previously, the murdered body of the young man's father had been discovered. Was there some remote connection there?

Truly it was an affair of many aspects. Kingsbury County people debated ardently but aimlessly.

Father and son, both favorites, one murdered, the other a murderer. Amateur psychologists betrayed their little learning in vain attempts to establish a connecting link between the two tragedies, but succeeded only in adding to the general confusion.

Uriel Gibbs was fairly besieged by questioners. Uriel had been town marshal at the time of the murder of William's father. He had resigned under a storm of popular indignation at his not having brought the murderer to justice. The people had later relented, but Mr. Gibbs had lost his taste for public office.

Now he was as non-committal as ever. Withal his geniality he was the smiling sphinx of old.

"Don't get excited," he said to a group that questioned him at the post-office. "Justice will prevail in the end. Murder will out."

"It didn't when you were marshal," said an ill-natured youth.

"No?" returned Uriel, unruffled at the attack. "Well—

> "The mills of the gods grind slowly,
> Yet they grind exceeding small."

Mr. Gibbs passed out, and the babel went on.

Out of the confusion, however, there rose one vague but fixed conviction. It was that if William Hutchinson were, indeed, the murderer he seemed, the fact was due to the prenatal influence of his having been born but a few months subsequent to the murder of his father.

"Let 'em rave," sententiously observed Mr. Gibbs to himself when he heard this. "Mr. Prenatal Influence is getting pretty smart when he can make two things, twenty-five years apart, happen on the same spot, picking out his own day for the second one at that. And he's getting pretty mean to make a murderer out of the son of murder's innocent victim. Prenatal influence! They're just racking their fool brains trying to find excuses for poor William, bless 'em."

Aaron Waterbury was remembered by the older people as a morose, silent, handsome boy, ardent but not conspicuously loyal in his friendships, and equally implacable and unscrupulous toward his enemies. He had been a brilliant boy, but erratic, a boy in some respects to be admired, but in no respect to be trusted. By some he had been considered a possible genius, by others a probable villain. In early manhood he had begun his wanderings, and he had since spent most of his years in strange lands, where, if report be true, he had led a picturesque if not commendable life.

Returning in middle age he had settled himself uncomfortably at the solitary hotel, where, with a savage dog, and some still more savage books—for Aaron was an atheist of the militant type—he appeared to spend his days in a sort of sullen peace.

Had he displayed the slightest friendliness toward his old-time neighbors they might, despite his past, have considered his return as in no way remarkable; but such was his disposition toward them that at length they began to wonder why he had returned at all.

His relations all had gone "to all parts of this world and the next," to quote a local wag; but Aaron never visited the graves of the departed ones, or inquired concerning the whereabouts of those believed still to be living.

At the end of a year's residence at the hotel his career had been cut short by the bullet from William Hutchinson's revolver.

It had been a solemn day, that last day

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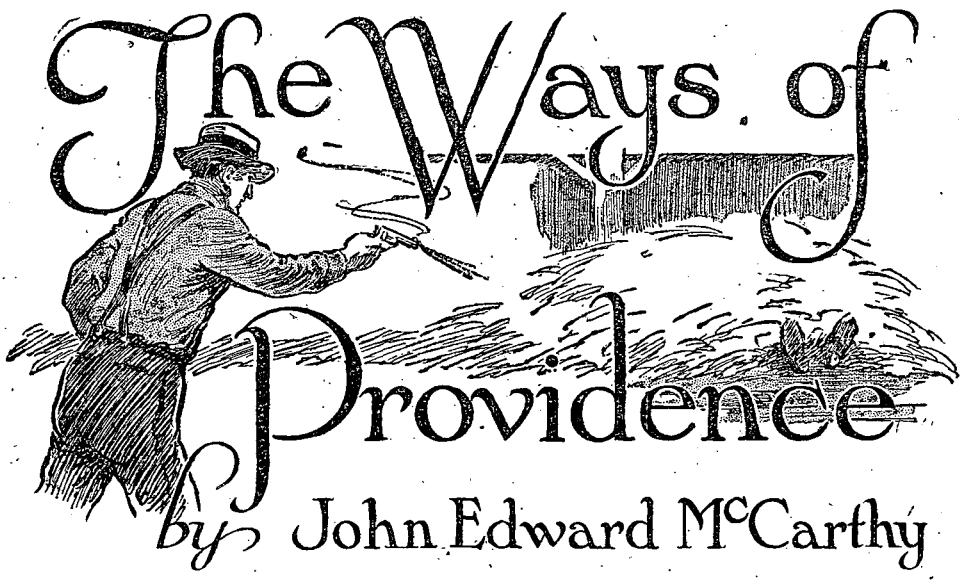

The Ways of Providence

by John Edward McCarthy

WHEN the evening newspapers told of the finding of the lifeless body of Aaron Waterbury in the cow-barn on the Hutchinson estate, the great public was duly shocked.

But the great public receives many such shocks; so, when the next morning editions told of the arrest of William Hutchinson, son of the widowed owner of the estate, the great public at once bestowed its interest elsewhere.

The Waterbury murder case seemed like a book with an epilogue too obvious to command attention. The trial, the result of which was a foregone conclusion in the belief of the great public, excited but little attention beyond the confines of Kingsbury County.

Kingsbury County people, however, in this case stood separate and distinct from the great public. They formed a special public—a very special public.

Kingsbury County was shocked to its marrow. What with William Hutchinson—whose story was rejected with reluctance by the men and with tears by the women—about to be tried for his life with not one chance in a million to substantiate his peculiar explanation of the tragedy, was there not added to all that the fascination of mystery and romance? Mystery and romance were rare in Kingsbury County.

The people waited hopefully for chance to bring forth the key to the problem, but no key forthcame.

William Hutchinson had killed Aaron Waterbury. That much the young man admitted. His story of random shooting, however, was regarded as a fabrication, doing but little credit to a young man of such marked intelligence.

He stoutly maintained that he had shot at random into the hay, and that the victim of his bullet had been concealed there for some reason unknown. He made no pretense that there had been an attack upon himself, or that he had shot upon finding the man concealed there. Merely, he had shot into the hay, as he had often done before, and the dying groan of Aaron Waterbury had followed.

The obvious weakness of this story, and the failure of all attempts on the part of his counsel to inspire in him interest along other lines of defense, bore home to his friends the belief that William was snapping his fingers in the face of fate.

William Hutchinson snapping his fingers in the face of a fate that bore with it disgrace did not present an understandable situation to any one.

Had the tragedy, coupled with his mother's death, upset his mind? If not, why was he defying the hangman?

He was to have been married on the day following that on which the unfortunate

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"Saw it?" said Gawne. "What do you mean?"

"Bozzam's black horse—turned loose in the corral."

Gawne winced. Billings watched him until he walked to the bed and sat on its edge, turning the note over and over. Then Billings went his way, grumbling.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon of the next day before Gawne's pride surrendered to his desires. Thoughts that had tortured him back in the days when he had discovered Marie Calvert's duplicity had recurred; those gnawing, tearing passions he had felt then came again—doubts, suspicions, hideous imaginings, raged and grew, died and revived.

He went out, told Billings to get Meteor ready, and mounted the animal. Later he halted the gray on the edge of the cut-bank, down which he had escorted Miss Harkless on the day of her coming.

From here he could be clearly seen from the Harkless ranch-house. Still more clearly could he be seen from the porch—where stood the slender, graceful figure of a woman. She was not looking toward Gawne, however; her gaze was fixed on the river trail, and Gawne involuntarily turned. A mile or so distant went a horse and rider. Gawne recognized the horse as Bozzam's black, and he paled and stiffened.

Intent, he watched the progress of the black horse for a full minute, perhaps, a riot of dark passion gripping him. Then he turned toward the porch. He saw Kathleen straighten, draw herself slowly erect, and face him.

For an instant she stood, looking at him, and then, when he urged Meteor down the cut-bank, she turned, her chin held high, walked across the porch, and went into the house, slamming the door behind her.

Gawne pulled Meteor to a halt so quickly that the gray stood on his hind legs, wheeled him, and sent him scampering up the slope of the cut-bank to the plains.

He rode a mile, to a point from which he could see Bozzam, on the black horse, traveling the river trail. He watched Bozzam out of sight. Then he spoke hoarsely to Meteor, and rode toward the Diamond Bar, a cold, twisting, bitter grin on his lips.

Billings saw him come in. Two hours later, at a cow-camp near the river, the foreman was talking with a Diamond Bar puncher.

"Scriptus," he said, "how far along did you git with that high-brow story of yourn?"

"Four chapters—when I runs low on inspiration—an' chucks it." He sniffed belligerently. "What for you askin'?"

"For the moral good of the damned outfit!" declared Billings savagely. "The boss is broodin' again—an' seein' red. If you're goin' to try to compose somethin' to soothe him again, you'd better make it sorta bloodthirsty. It 'll come pretty close to ringin' his bell, then!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

PERPLEXITY

SOME day we'll understand the things
That now perplex;
Some day we'll cast the shackles off
That chafe and vex.
We'll know why deeds of kindliness
No chaplets find;
Why selfish greed and enmity
Our efforts bind.
So helplessly the night we pass,
And grope our way
Until a light divinely shows
The truth—some day!

Harry Bryan Owsley.

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to tell her about Gawne and Blanche, you've made a start. Now tell her about yourself. Tell her this—it's the Gospel truth—that if she doesn't take me, Bob Haskell will hang you from the highest tree that he can get a rope to!"

"My God!" exclaimed the colonel, his face blanching, his eyes staring as they met the naked passion in the gaze of the other. "You won't let Haskell do that!"

Bozzam laughed vibrantly, with mirthless earnestness.

"Try me!" he warned.

The colonel shivered and cringed. The clammy, damnable chills were running over him. Once, when Bozzam had opened this conversation, he had steeled himself against the sacrifice. He had felt the iron of resolution turn to putty under Bozzam's words; but he knew now, with the fear and dread of death menacing him, that he was going to yield.

"Give me time," he quavered. He would have called the thing a sacrifice now, but he was afraid to offend Bozzam even to that extent. "It can't be done in a minute—it will take a week—a month, maybe."

"Take a month," grinned Bozzam. "But that's the limit. My house is as empty as my heart—and both need a woman!"

He laughed deep in his throat, and left the colonel alone on the porch.

CHAPTER XIX.

DARKNESS.

BY the time Gawne was able to get out of bed, the Harkless trail—so far as Gawne could see it—was as familiar to him as the fingers on his good hand.

Not for an instant, willingly, had he removed his gaze from it during his waking hours, and at night, so long as the trail was discernible, he kept his vigil at the window.

His imagination played tricks on him sometimes. He would stare at the point where the trail seemed to melt into the horizon, until he was certain that a pony and rider were taking form there. Never had pony and rider materialized; Kathleen Harkless had not come.

The suspense and anxiety grew intolerable. On the morning of a day about a week after Kathleen's visit, Gawne could stand it no longer—and called Billings.

"Take this over to Miss Harkless."

He gave the foreman a note that he had written. Its tone betrayed his impatience:

> Jane's education is being neglected. I feel neglected myself. Have you ever been kept to confounded bed while some one you love has been galivanting around in the open—perhaps not even thinking of you? Answer that, my lady! I take that back if *you* have been sick. But if you are well and you do not come right over, I'll ride Meteor tomorrow if it kills me. So, if you care anything for me, please come.
>
> Yours,
> GAWNE.

Billings went out, smiling on the side of his face that was not visible to Gawne. He was gone an unconscionably long time, and when he dismounted at the door of the Diamond Bar ranch-house Gawne faced him eagerly. Billings's face was troubled and perplexed as he returned Gawne's note, unopened.

"Wasn't she there?" asked Gawne.

"I reckon she was—plenty. *And* some! She was proud an' stiff as one of them train-bearers which them furrin' kings has hangin' around. Or, it's a queen, mebbe. Anyhow, she was proud an' scornful like. She spurned the note—as Scriptus would say—spurned it complete. 'Is that for me?' she asts. An' I says, 'Ma'am, your powers of observation is tremenjous.' She sniffs an' casts a witherin' eye on me. 'Tell your master,' she says, 'that I'll have no further communication with him. Furthermore, I never wish to see him again.'"

"Was that all, Billings?" Gawne's face was ashen.

"All?" said the foreman. "If she'd gone on at that rate for another minute, she'd have choked to death—she was that near cryin'."

"She gave no reason?"

"Not none. But I seen the reason, I reckon."

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White and shaking, the girl stood, dismayed. When she could find her voice she was astonished at the queer sound it made—it did not seem to belong to her at all.

"You mean, then, that Hame Bozzam likes me? That Mr. Gawne—then it is true—what father said—that you and Mr. Gawne—"

"Quite true, my dear," interrupted the other. "Jeff Gawne and I have been very dear friends for—for many years."

"And Bozzam," went on Kathleen, stiff with a growing composure, now determined to reach an understanding with this woman despite the tortuous method. She was now as pitilessly frank as the other. "You have broken with Bozzam? Why?"

The woman's smile was maddeningly calm.

"Bozzam and I were never temperamentally suited to each other. I endured him, though—for reasons. But when Jeff Gawne was hurt—when he told me with his last words—before he became unconscious—that he wanted me to go to the Diamond Bar with him—to stay—why, I decided to desert Bozzam."

"Mr. Gawne asked you?" said Kathleen slowly.

"Do you think I should have gone with him, otherwise? Does a woman of any spirit run after a man? Does she accept anything that the man does not willingly give her? Would you? Would you—in my position—have gone with Jeff Gawne unless you knew he wanted you — unless he told you that he wanted you?"

"I would never permit myself to get into the position you refer to." Kathleen's voice was coldly contemptuous. She felt repaid for the other's clever gibes; she had scored once, at least.

She realized how heavily when she saw the other's face flush under the rouge. Miss Le Claire's lips, tight-pressed, took on hard lines; her eyes gleamed with malicious bitterness. Yet she laughed—it was a fairly good counterfeit of nonchalant mirth.

"Well," she said, "we understand each other now, my dear. I really did not think that you had gone so far with Jeff as to be vicious about it. I know your nature, my dear. Sharing him with another would not do for you. It will be hard for you—at first. But, my dear child, seek consolation. All disappointed women seek it. You will not have to seek long—or far. Twenty miles.

"Hame Bozzam would go through hell to get you. No—he didn't tell me," she went on, smiling at the fearing, dismayed look in Kathleen's eyes; "but we were discussing you—and he said some things—and he has a picture of you that your father gave him; and I have seen him studying it for hours. And he has been here four times in as many weeks—and that is more times than he has been here in that many years before."

Kathleen straightened. "I do not find the pleasure of consoling myself quite so easy as—some people find it," she said, looking straight at the other.

"Meaning me, of course," said Miss Le Claire calmly. She rose and smiled chillingly. "I had hoped that we might be friends, Miss Harkless. Believe me, I feel rather offended over your haughty attitude." She laughed shrilly, with real mirth now, for she had won her battle, and walked to her horse. Sitting in the saddle, she laughed again disdainfully. "I think you are rather too good for Gawne—even if he did want you. He was telling me yesterday that women of your type made him tired."

She urged her animal on toward the Diamond Bar trail, her derisive laughter stinging Kathleen with its recurring cadences like separate and distinct lashes of a whip.

Hame Bozzam, likewise, had a visitor. Colonel Harkless was sitting on the big front porch of the H-B ranch-house, his head bowed, his shoulders hunched up, listening to Bozzam.

The big man's voice was sharp and cold, his manner that of the master.

"It comes to this, Harkless," he was saying. "I want her—as a wife—if I can get her that way. If I can't, I'll take her the other way. Suit yourself. It's up to you. If you've told her what I told you

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"Cat!" was Miss Harkless's vicious judgment, voiced internally.

"Sensible—and pretty," decided Blanche Le Claire. "I must be careful."

Since tradition and—perhaps—a wise providence, have ordained that the female of the human species be not battle-muscled nor ferocious to the point of fight-hunger when in the presence of a rival, these two knew that their battle was to be one of wits, and of honeyed stings, and velvet-garbed, soul-searching thrusts that would hurt quite as much as the baser—though less cruel—weapons of the males.

Miss Le Claire's advantage was sophistication, and ability to conceal her wounds. Already, in Miss Harkless's pale face, stiff lips and tortured eyes, the Le Claire woman could see signs of distress. They but made her more sure of herself; her smile, as she dismounted and walked toward her rival, was smooth and superior, with a delicate hint of condescension thinly concealed in it.

"This is Miss Harkless, isn't it?" she said, and held out a white, limp hand which Miss Harkless took jerkily and then dropped, as though the contact burned her. Miss Le Claire's laugh showed that she had taken cognizance of the movement.

"I hope you will pardon my neglect of you, my dear. I should have ridden over, ages ago. I am Miss Le Claire. But it is so far—to Bozzam's place—from here. Your father has told you about me—I am sure."

"Yes," said Kathleen, not entirely concealing her hostility under the other's smiling scrutiny.

"Is the colonel at home?"

"My father has gone to Bozzam City."

"Good!" smiled Miss Le Claire. "Then we can visit without fear of a male listener. Men *are* a bother, aren't they, dear?"

Kathleen wondered and gazed, unsmiling, at her visitor.

Miss Le Claire crossed the porch and seated herself in a big rocker, crossed her legs and clasping her hands over a knee rocked back and forth comfortably, with a curious disregard for convention that brought frank wonder to Kathleen's eyes. The other noted it, and laughed.

"Don't be shocked, my dear," she said. She looked keenly at the girl. "Has Hame Bozzam visited you—yet?"

Kathleen nodded.

"When?" asked Blanche.

Kathleen told her that Bozzam had been there the day before, and Blanche laughed lightly.

"Yesterday," she said. "Why, he told me he had been here several times!"

"So he said. I happened to be absent each time."

"At the Diamond Bar, I suppose? It is quite enterprising and—considerate of you—to spend so much of your time and patience with—Jane Carter." She looked reflectively at the girl. "He is crazy over you," she smiled.

Kathleen's heart pounded hard, and some color leaped into her pale cheeks. Could it be that she had judged prematurely, and that Gawne and Blanche Le Claire had never achieved that intimacy of which the colonel had so definitely hinted? She had some difficulty in keeping her voice steady, but felt that she managed it.

"I hadn't noticed," she said.

Blanche laughed oddly. "Of course not!" she returned; "how could you—when you have seen him only once?"

"Once?" said Kathleen.

A glance at the other's face convinced her of her error; there was a malicious glint in the woman's eyes, and Kathleen saw that she had been deliberately led into the pit-fall. This woman was too worldly wise and crafty for her to cope with, and she suddenly felt impotent and helpless, and utterly defeated.

"I—I thought—you meant—"

"Jeff Gawne?" laughed the other, heartlessly. "Why, bless the child! What made you think—why, my dear; Jeff Gawne amuses himself—as nearly all men do. I don't hold it against him. For all men, especially all of those with whom I have come in contact, are hunters. But Jeff Gawne! Let us not be rivals, my dear—for Jeff Gawne is promised to me. He's been mine for years, my dear, and I should feel very evilly toward you if you should try—" she laughed, not finishing, as though the thought were one that would not bear serious consideration.

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vision that contrasted sharply with the blasé and hardened wanton of Bozzam City.

The startling reform in dress did not fool Gawne. Her pursuit of him in the past had been rather too apparent. She stood watching him and he noted that the color in her cheeks was not artificial.

Her garments, her attitude, the mute appeal in her eyes, advertised her motive in coming to the Diamond Bar, and though he was reluctant to re-open a subject that had always been distasteful to him, he knew that it was merely simple justice to the girl who had knelt at his bedside the day before.

He smiled gravely and pointed to a chair near the bed.

"Sit down," he said; "and let's have a talk with no kinks in it."

That talk was made, and when it was ended Blanche Le Claire strode stiffly to the door through which Jane had vanished. Her eyes were red and her lips were quivering. Gawne had been as gentle as plain speech and pity would permit, and Blanche Le Claire felt little resentment for him.

There was blame, though, and furious jealousy, in her heart for the direct-eyed girl who had made her long hoped-for conquest of Gawne impossible.

She went immediately to her room. There she ripped off the simple house-dress that she had donned for Gawne's benefit, tore it to shreds, punctuating each muscular effort with profane invective.

Her fury subsided with the destruction of the dress. Pale with the straining reaction, she began deliberately to array herself in the bizarre garments of her kind—rouging her cheeks and her lips until she was a grotesquely-colored horror whose trade was unmistakably advertised.

She was artistic, though—the make-up genius of Thespis would have marveled and applauded. And yet she did not intend to act; she was going to be the creature who had lived the part she intended to portray—which she was going to continue to live, now, more riotously than ever, since the one man had a talk "with no kinks in it."

More—going on with her moral degradation—she intended to poison the soul of another; that of the girl whose virtue was a reproach to her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CROSS FIRE.

BLANCHE LE CLAIRE left the Diamond Bar ranch with no outward indication of hurt. Billings, noticing her, remarked to Happy McGonagle that she was "scrumptuous-lookin'," anyhow — a phrase made descriptive by significance left unsaid.

Blanche rode toward the Harkless ranch. Billings noted that with some puzzlement. "She's sure headin' for her range," he assured himself. But his interest in women being negative, he dismissed her from his thoughts and trained his voice sarcastically upon Scriptus, that occupation being his chief diversion.

"When you grow to be a full-fledged novelist do you reckon you'll be able to git a woman like Blanche Le Claire into it?" he mildly asked the past-aspiring author.

"I ain't taxin' my brains no more," sneered the other. "I'd a heap ruther take as a subjec' a fool foreman which goes around askin' box-head questions."

Billings sniffed sarcastically, but subsided.

Blanche Le Claire did not approach the Harkless ranch-house from the direction of the Diamond Bar. That might have made her plan transparent—if by any chance Kathleen Harkless should happen to see her coming. She made a wide détour, and came upon the ranch-house from the mountain trail.

She was seen, too, she noted with a quick compression of the lips; Kathleen Harkless was standing on the front porch of the ranch-house watching her intently.

It was the first time the women had seen each other, yet each was certain of the identy of the other, and their quick, probing, appraising glances met, crossed—and each knew the other for what she was.

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being worse than his men—and that all were "damned pirates"—and clumped out, leaving Billings looking at his boss with a twisting, half-serious, imbecilic grin.

"Now ain't that the most unreasonable man you ever seen?" demanded Billings. "Here we've herded him more careful than any hen ever herded day-old chickens—an' he don't appreciate it!"

"Go and tell him to come back here—I want to apologize to him!" ordered Gawne.

Billings stepped to the door, looked out, and turning, faced Gawne, gulping with some deep emotion.

"It's no use, boss; he's a fannin' it right smart through the basin. He must be gone two miles, already. You see, boss; he was wantin' to git back to town—where he had a lot of patients needin' his care—he said. An' I had to speak right plain to him."

"You're a damned scoundrel, and your men are no better," said Gawne. "I swear that one of these days I'll fire the whole outfit! Now get out of here!"

Gawne propped himself up in bed, thus providing himself with a view of the Harkless trail. He was steadily peering into the blur of sun and heat half an hour later, when Jane tiptoed into the room.

The girl was sobbingly repentant. She declared she "hated" Sunshine Gap and would never go there again—never! He comforted her gently, and forgiveness and remorse were fellows in earnestness for some minutes.

"Kathie Harkless is coming over every day, after this, daddy," she whispered, cuddling her face against Gawne's. "She's nice, isn't she?"

Gawne drew the girl closer.

"Isn't she?" she insisted.

"Why, of course."

The girl was quiet in his embrace for several seconds; he felt her eyelashes brush his cheek, and he waited, divining that she was considering some weighty problem.

"I've never had a mama—a real mama, that is—that I could look at, and love—and let hug me," she said, slowly and wistfully. "I wish I had one. Aunt Emily might do. Only—only she's too old—and she worries Uncle Lafe so. I'm afraid she's got too many cares now, to want to be my mama." She drew back and looked at Gawne in frank inquiry. "Would it be too much trouble for you to marry Kathie Harkless and let her be my mama?"

"Selfish," he gibed. "You wouldn't want me to marry her for that reason alone—would you?"

"That wouldn't be the only reason, daddy!" She flashed a meaning glance at him.

"Meaning what?" he demanded, coloring.

"Oh, shucks, daddy—you are pretending. And you can't pretend very well any more—since—since lately. You do like her, don't you, daddy? Say you do!"

He felt her muscles tense and saw the anxiety in her eyes. He grinned widely and nodded affirmatively, and the next instant Jane was hugging him so tightly that a twinge of pain shot through his shoulder. But he endured it silently, gritting his teeth in joyous agony.

Jane was fussing about the room a little later when Blanche Le Claire came in. The girl made herself as inconspicuous as possible, by huddling herself down in a chair. When Gawne looked at her a moment after Blanche Le Claire's entrance, she was gazing meditatively out of a window. But he saw rebellion in her attitude—she would not have pretended complete ignorance of Kathleen Harkless's presence.

Gawne heard her rise presently, and gravely marked her progress until he heard the door slam very slightly, behind her. Then he slyly looked at Miss Le Claire to observe how she received the declaration of war. She was calmly rearranging a curtain at one of the windows, though her pose was too studied to deceive Gawne.

It was some minutes after Jane's departure that Miss Le Claire left the window and walked toward the bed. She had made her toilet very carefully this morning; and, a loose house-dress of some white, striped material—high at the throat, with loose lines that merely suggested the lithe lines of her own figure—made her a homey

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wouldn't have anything to do with him. A man who will live with a woman like Blanche Le Claire isn't—"

"That's malicious scandal, Kathie." The flush on the colonel's face provoked the girl to swift speculation. Why should her father show embarrassment over such a discussion—with his daughter?

"Some folks around here don't like Hame Bozzam, and they've lied about him. The Le Claire woman was his housekeeper—so far as I know. He took her out of a place in Bozzam City to reform her. She's been straight since. I've always thought that move by Bozzam was at the bottom of the bad feeling between Gawne and Bozzam."

"What do you mean?"

The girl's heart was cold with a dread divination.

"Why," said the colonel gruffly; "Gawne and the Le Claire woman were pretty thick before Hame Bozzam took her."

Kathleen did not answer. Holding herself straight and stiff she walked past her father and into the house. A little later she was in her room, sitting on the side of the bed staring straight ahead of her. The figure of a man, sorely wounded, was in her vision; and she marked the honest, smiling look in his eyes when he said: "She isn't my kind, Kathleen." She shivered, and the lines of her lips grew straight.

Sitting rigid in a chair on the porch, the colonel, too, was seeing a vision—or many of them. They were the fatal weaknesses of his character, and they marched before him in serried array—a never-ending multitude of them. They had blasted his life, but he had not the moral strength to defy them.

The insidious fiber of cowardice which had made his youth a hideous period of fawning toadyism by which he had escaped physical clashes with his classmates, had grown and grown in size and strength until it was now stifling the last noble instinct that was left him—the paternal determination to protect his daughter from the social wolf-pack.

Hame Bozzam lied about? Yes—Colonel Harkless had lied about Hame Bozzam. And to his daughter! He, too, shivered over his vision, and clenched his hands, groaning bitterly.

CHAPTER XVII.

"HELL HATH NO FURY—"

GAWNE awoke the next morning, refreshed to find the Las Vegas doctor standing near the side of the bed, smiling. There followed felicitations, more human than medical, out of which Gawne gathered he had a marvelous constitution and remarkable recuperative powers. Then the doctor, who had been a virtual captive for two days at the Diamond Bar, walked to an outside door and motioned to someone.

Billings came in. His expression of anxiety faded to delight when he looked at Gawne.

"Feelin' chipper, eh?" said the foreman. He smothered a grin as his gaze roved to the doctor.

The latter reddened.

"I suppose your damned guardianship isn't effective any longer?" he suggested.

"The' ain't no more danger?" Billings looked appraisingly at Gawne. "He's goin' to git well?"

The doctor sniffed disgustedly.

"I warrant he'll live to be a hundred!" He narrowed his eyes at Billings. "Would you really have carried out your threat?"

The foreman spoke slowly, his eyes were steady and unblinking as they met the doctor's.

"Four of the boys have been hangin' around night an' day since you bin here. They've had orders to salivate you if you tried to git away."

The doctor paled.

"Hell, man; you don't mean to say you'd have killed me? I don't believe it! I never believed it!"

"You've uncommon faith," drawled Billings. "If we ever need a doctor here again—which I ain't hopin' we will; why, we'll be dead certain to send for you."

The doctor's face was purple. When he heard a cackle from Gawne, he glared at the invalid, muttered something about him

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ley, and Paisley—though seriously wounded —will recover. He told me what had happened, and the next time you see Gawne you may tell him that when Paisley recovers enough to travel he will leave the H-B."

"Evidently neither you nor your men like Mr. Gawne," she said, looking straight at him.

"No." He met her gaze with a cold, steady smile.

"Why?"

"We are temperamentally different," he said blandly. "I suppose none of us can tell exactly why we do not like certain persons—and yet we do dislike them. I have nothing to say against Gawne. Except"—and here his eyes gleamed under twitching lids and his teeth flashed in a grin of derisive amusement—"that when he departed from my house he carried off my housekeeper, Miss Le Claire."

"Miss Le Claire went to the Diamond Bar of her own accord," said Kathleen stiffly, resenting the significance of Bozzam's amusement. "I am quite sure Mr. Gawne doesn't want her!"

"Did you get that from Miss Le Claire?" His smile betrayed disbelief, sarcastic incredulity. It goaded Kathleen to a furious anger, which she tried to suppress.

"Mr. Gawne told me this morning," she said. And then, when she saw his smile broaden she flushed hotly, for she knew, then, that his questions had been freighted with an ulterior purpose—he had wanted to discover the nature of her friendship with Gawne.

By implication she had told him that it was deep enough to permit a discussion of Miss Le Claire. And while she stood, furious with indignation and embarrassment, meditating retreat, she saw that he did not intend to press the point, for he laughed carelessly.

"Well, love makes the world go round!" His voice was full, vibrant, and she knew, in a sudden flash of comprehension, exactly the type of man he was—a winner of women, a conqueror who held success lightly.

He must have seen that knowledge flashing in her eyes, for his own met hers, held them and gleamed into hers understandingly, with an intimate, subtle warmness that set her atingle with some breathless emotion. It was only when she heard her father coughing that she could withdraw her gaze from his, and then she felt the shame of the conflict and stood, not daring to retreat lest she advertise unmistakably her knowledge of his meaning.

"You must not play favorites, Miss Harkless," she heard Bozzam saying. "The H-B ranch is as the end of a beautiful ride —over the desert, or through the basin; and you may be sure of my appreciation." She felt him looking at her, but did not meet his gaze, and he laughed softly. "The colonel will be glad to come with you."

She stole a glance at her father, noted a flush on his face, and, puzzled, she looked at Bozzam, at the instant he took one of her hands in his. His eyes were glowing with bold admiration and confidence; the grip of his hand on hers was warm and possessive. Once again she felt the subtle thrill of responsive passion; though she knew now that she feared this man; and a chill of portending evil sent a shudder through her.

And then, with a laugh, he had dropped her hand and was striding toward the black horse. She watched him mount and ride away; leaned against one of the porch posts and followed the progress of the dust cloud that enveloped him, until the clouds swept around a turn in the trail, far down the river. Then she turned to look at her father.

The colonel's face was pale; his eyes shifted furtively under her direct gaze.

"What kind of a man is Hame Bozzam, father?"

"Bozzam's all right, Kathie," he returned, steeling himself against her intensely questioning eyes. "He's a little impetuous, my dear—a little impetuous; full of fire and vigor. But he's a fair dealer. He's not a sneak."

"How long have you known him?"

"Ever since I've been here. He was here when I came. He founded Bozzam City."

"I don't like him." She thought she saw the colonel's eyes flash, but she could not analyze the expression. "I wish you

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ing Gawne to the Diamond Bar indicated something deeper than a mere expression of duty to the victim of her lord's blood-lust. For if she was loyal to Bozzam she would have stayed with Bozzam. So suspicion of the woman's motives grew stronger in the girl's thoughts as she rode homeward.

When she urged her pony down the cut-bank near the house she saw a big black horse hitched to a rail of the corral fence.

She turned her own animal into the corral, went in the back door of the house, removed the stains of travel, walked through the dining-room, taking a book from a rack as she passed, intending to go out on the front porch to read. As she reached the door leading to the porch she saw her father and a big, bearded man standing near the doorway. While she paused, meditating retreat, the colonel called to her:

"Come here, Kathleen."

An instant later she was appraising Hame Bozzam while he shook her hand.

She was curious over this man who, for two years, had ruled the polyandrous Le Claire woman, and, in spite of her contempt for his kind, she felt a queer thrill of admiration for his intense virility.

The man exuded strength and vigor. He was big—bigger than Gawne, she thought; more massive, more heavily muscled. His shoulders were wider, his chest deeper. As he turned from her—after her unsmiling greeting—to speak to her father, she caught a glimpse of the lines of his chin and throat through the short, yellow-brown beard, and found herself wondering why he wore the beard—he would have been much better looking without it.

For, studying him as he talked with her father, she saw that his features might have been the envy of any man; they were handsomer than Gawne's, which bore the stamp of mental strength.

This man was more physical than Gawne. Yet, in some subtle way he seemed the weaker. She was certain, after a while, that the weakness was in his character. And yet, when he turned presently and spoke to her, she was again conscious of the queer thrill of admiration for him. Unwaveringly, however, she met the gaze of his smiling eyes.

"I have called twice before, Miss Harkless," he said. "Each time I was disappointed in not finding you at home."

The man's poise astonished her. He was calm, masterful and suave, and she caught herself wondering where he had acquired these graces. She ceased to wonder why the Le Claire woman had permitted herself to be ruled by him.

"I regret my absences, I assure you. I have been riding to the Diamond Bar every day in an effort to perfect Jane Carter's education."

And then she flushed, for, riding homeward, she had decided that she hated this man, Bozzam, and, if opportunity came, she would be rude to him. And here she was, making excuses to him, and explaining her absences.

"That is interesting," he said, looking at her speculatively. "I haven't seen the child, except from a distance, for six years—or since Gawne took possession of her. Your father tells me you rode over there this morning. How is Gawne?"

"He will recover, the doctor says," she answered, and saw his eyes glitter.

She wondered at the cold composure that would permit such a question when he must know that she knew of Paisley's offense. She felt that she must have permitted something of the thought to show in her face, for she saw his eyes lighten, and he spoke immediately:

"I am sorry it happened. Some of my men say Gawne burst in upon them from the direction of the desert, chasing Paisley—and killing mad. He shot Paisley down right in front of the bunk-house, and several of my men were inside. You can imagine what followed.

"My men thought, naturally, that Gawne was out for a clean-up, and they tried to accommodate him. That was my own thought, when I went out on the porch, after hearing the shooting. I tried very hard to shoot Gawne, but was prevented. I didn't know until afterward, when the Diamond Bar men had taken Gawne away, what really had happened.

"Gawne hadn't been thorough with Pais-

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"And unconscious of it," he said lightly.

"Oh," she said, "do you think it is humorous?"

He closed his eyes to keep her from seeing the exultation in them. He knew jealousy when he saw it; he knew what it meant—the fire and spirit of this girl would not tolerate a rival—not even a potential rival. She had fenced verbally with him; but words were no longer a shield behind which she could conceal her feelings—they blazed forth, naked and unmistakable. He found her hand and pressed it, meeting her sober eyes steadily.

"Miss Le Claire saved my life, Kathleen. You heard what Billings said. Billings gossips like a woman!"

"Would you have him conceal what has happened?"—accusingly.

"Of course not!"

"But you just said—"

"Billings might have let me tell it."

"Oh." Her eyes softened a little. "Would you?"

"Of course. Why not? I have nothing to conceal. I have not seen Blanche Le Claire more than a dozen times, and—"

"That is a good many, isn't it?"

"And I have never talked with her—as I have talked with you, for instance. She isn't my kind, Kathleen—you ought to know that. I couldn't prevent her coming. I didn't know anything about it."

She pressed her lips; obviously she was not ashamed of her jealousy.

"Why should she come here if you don't know her very well?"

"She saved my life, Kathleen. I suppose, because Hame Bozzam shot me, she felt that she owed me something, and took this way of repaying me. She realized, perhaps, that a woman's care is somewhat more effective than a man's, and—"

"There was Aunt Emily."

Gawne was silent.

"And you might have sent for me."

"I didn't know." He smiled up at her. "And if you hadn't neglected Jane's education, you would have been here the next morning."

"You had no business to kiss me like that."

"I'd do it again—right now—if I could!" he declared, hungrily. "Kathleen," he added; "I have dreamed of you every minute since—since I got into a condition to dream!"

Her eyes glowed warmly; he saw forgiveness and renewed faith in them. He smiled, holding out his one good arm.

A few minutes later, Aunt Emily, sticking her head into the room, saw Kathleen on her knees beside the bed, smoothing Gawne's forehead.

Aunt Emily did not go away immediately. She stood at the door until she heard Kathleen say: "Go to sleep, dear," and then she descended the stairs smiling.

CHAPTER XVI.

BOZZAM INTRODUCES HIMSELF.

KATHLEEN rode thoughtfully homeward.

The discovery of the presence of the Le Claire woman at the Diamond Bar had been a shock to her. She had not intended to ride to the Diamond Bar to-day—nor for many days—for she had wanted to punish Gawne for his impetuosity. She would make him understand that she was not to be stormed and carried off bodily. She was not going to yield so easily.

Then the colonel, who had ridden to Bozzam City, returned to recount to her the details of Gawne's fight and his injury at the Bozzam ranch-house, and her resolutions exploded like bubbles too strenuously blown. Yet on the way over to the Diamond Bar her concern for Gawne barely survived the heat of her jealousy.

Gawne's explanation had dispersed the jealousy. Kathleen was repentant, and except for a disturbing resentment for the Le Claire woman's boldness in following Gawne to the Diamond Bar she felt no mental uneasiness. Yet the Le Claire woman's devotion was provocative of persistent speculation.

Gawne's protestations that he had never looked with longing eyes upon the woman were no doubt sincere—for she knew of his abhorrence for the weak and erring of her sex.

But the woman's action in accompany-

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"Jane tears up, all out of breath, an' tells us somethin' that sets us blood-thirsty, pronto. We don't hesitate none. We sort of figgers that Paisley would light out for the H-B, an' we ain't admirin' that mountain ride consid'able. We figgered that we'd make time by headin' straight for Bozzam's place, an' if Paisley an' Gawne—or Paisley alone—hadn't got there yet, we'd know they'd settled it in the desert.

"In that case we'd just keep on fannin' an' git to them sometime or other. Anyways, we figgered that we'd git to where Gawne an' Paisley was sooner by hittin' the breeze right straight through the big basin to the H-B.

"Sure enough, we done so. There was ten of us—includin' myself—which I felt like an army post on the war-path, seein' red an' utter careless of reinforcements—an' we burns up to the Bozzam shack, itchin' for a clean-up.

"Gentlemen, don't make a whimper! The clean-up had took place! The' was a geezer, bored plumb through the front of his think tank, sorta standin' on his head beside a little buildin'—lookin' like he'd fell offen it—after; the' was two more, bored neat, layin' in front of the bunk-house; an' Paisley, clutterin' up the scenery near the ranch-house. Then the' was two more in the bunk-house, bored plenty, but still bein' able to do a heap of groanin'.

"That's what we seen—after. When we busts into view around a corner of the shack we seen a guy standin' over Riddle, just swingin' his gun down on him. I noticed six punctures in that guy's hide before I stopped countin'. We hadn't got there any too soon.

"At first we didn't notice nothin' else. An' then I hears one of the boys yappin', an' I sees the Le Claire woman standin' on the porch, bendin' a gun an Hame Bozzam! Bozzam had been nicked—just grazed—by Riddle, the Le Claire woman told us afterward—whilst he was hidin' behind a porch post, tryin' to pot Riddle.

"Bozzam had tried to bore Riddle, while Riddle was reelin' around after bein' punctured clear through, but the Le Claire woman had buzzed out on the porch an' clinched with him just as he drawed a bead on Riddle. Therefore, Bozzam's bullet only creases Riddle. It knocks him, though, an' the boys thought he'd passed out—an' they was for rippin' the Bozzam shack to splinters—an' for swingin' Bozzam—an' for goin' to Bozzam City to round up the rest of the gang—an' all such enjoyments.

"The Le Claire woman put a crimp in that! She sets down hard on the proposition—says she don't want Bozzam hurt. Tells us, scornful, that we'd better git Riddle back to the Diamond Bar—where he'd git the care he needed, an' that, if we was friends of his'n, we'd better have some one burn the breeze to Las Vegas to git a doctor. Which we done—sendin' McGonagle, which brings the doc in record time—an' the doc says he's got a chance.

"Now, you'd think—wouldn't you—that the Le Claire woman—havin' lived with Hame Bozzam for upward of two years—would have stood with Bozzam in this? She didn't. 'Gawne needs a woman's care,' she tells me; 'an' I'm goin' to the Diamond Bar with him.' Which she done. She's been here two days, an' she ain't left him out of her sight until just now, when she plumb tuckered out an' had to rest."

Billings's voice ceased droning. There was a long silence. Then:

"That was very good of her—I am sure."

It was Kathleen's voice, coldly formal and expressionless. It startled Gawne to complete consciousness, and with an effort he swung his left hand out from the bed and waved it. He heard a rustle, and then Kathleen was at the bedside. He saw from the expression of her face that she knew he had heard, and when he caught a glimpse of Billings's visage, over her shoulder, he glared disapproval at it.

"Get out of here, you!" he commanded. And Billings withdrew.

Gawne smiled, studying the sober face of the girl who stood beside him.

"It happened two or three days ago," he said reproachfully. "And, according to Billings, this is the first time you have been here."

"I didn't hear of it until this morning. And besides—according to Billings"—she gave him a look of icy reproof—"you have been faithfully attended."

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Riddle Gawne

by Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "The Two-Gun Man," "The Coming of the Law," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

JEFFERSON GAWNE—better known to Bozzam City as Riddle Gawne—rescued Kathleen Harkless from the uncomfortable attentions of a cattle rustler named Cass; and at once Gawne's antipathy toward womankind underwent a change.

Hame Bozzam, founder of Bozzam City and chief of the cattle rustlers, also thought Kathleen good to look upon, and as Kathleen's father, Colonel Harkless, had to do pretty much what Bozzam ordered, Bozzam did not anticipate much trouble, even if he did know that Gawne hated him. And Blanche Le Claire did not mind. She was tired of Bozzam, anyway. And wanted Gawne!

Gawne did not know that Bozzam was really Watt Hyat, the murderer of his, Gawne's, brother, Wesley, but something like a climax was reached when Nigger Paisley, a rustler, attacked Sunshine Jane, Gawne's foster daughter.

Like a Nemesis, Gawne trailed Paisley to the Bozzam ranch, vengeance in his cold, gray eyes. And when he found the whole Bozzam outfit arrayed against him, he fought desperately, craftily, and with terrible effectiveness—so effectively that it was at the moment when he was ready to fill Bozzam full of large bullet-holes that Blanche Le Claire appeared on the Bozzam porch, flung her arms about Bozzam, and—

The air on the porch was torn asunder. Something crashed against Gawne's head, and he tumbled headlong upon his face and lay—very still.

CHAPTER XV.

THROUGH GREEN EYES.

WHEN consciousness began to return to Gawne he heard a voice droning near him. Recognizing the voice as belonging to Billings, his foreman, he listened. He could not open his eyes; in the semi-stupor which was upon him all suggestion of action or movement was opposed and resisted by an overpowering inclination to rest.

He had a slight glimmering of recollection, which grew stronger with every pulse-beat, though it seemed to be an age before he succeeded in patching things together. Then, when coherent thought took the place of the weird and detached fancies that had been flitting before him, he opened his eyes, recognized his own room in the Diamond Bar ranch-house, and immediately closed his eyes again, and paid attention to Billings's voice:

"We was combin' the timber in the river-bottom when we saw Jane comin', lickety-split, on Ginger. We knowed somethin' was wrong soon as we seen her, an' by the time she got to us we was ready for anything. Well, that anything wasn't a whole lot tardy.

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teller himself, I guess, until I cut loose, like you told me to, with some of my yarns. Two evenin's ago he shut up and left the floor to me.

"I was settin' in the parlor alone with him to-night, tryin' to cover up Mehitable's getaway from the house by tellin' him a couple of gags I was readin' in the *Cattleman's and Drover's Guide* this mornin'—when all of a sudden he jumped up and reached for his six-gun and that meat-ax, which he declared his intention of separatin' me from my life with. His eyes was rollin' wild in his head, and there was murder in 'em, if ever I saw it."

A couple of us was overtook with such a bad attack of coughing that we had to step back into the bunk-house to get over it.

"If he ain't been crazy before," says Len Hickey, turning his hoss's head around, "he's gone completely loco now. A dangerous lunatic like that hadn't ought to be left at large. I've warned you that he's out to kill somebody before the night's over, and a bunch of you'd better ride to town and spread the alarm there. I'd come along and join any posse the sheriff got up to go and take him, only Mehitable must have been waitin' for me 'most twenty minutes already. I've got to ride on and keep my date with her."

He cantered away, and we fell over each other to get to the corral and saddle up our nags. A couple of minutes later we was tearing for the railroad tracks, to overhear his proposal to Gabe Pearsall's gal.

As we topped the last rise of sand and sage-brush that shut us off from a view of the water-tank, we seen Len Hickey just climbing down off his cayuse in front of it. He started toward the lone figure that stood beside the tracks, and we dismounted and sneaked after him through the darkness into ear-shot.

"You want me to — *what?*" we heard Mehitable exclaim.

"Marry me, I said," Len Hickey's voice floated to us, confident. "I want you to quit livin' out here all alone in the desert, and come into town with me. I've got a little money saved up—not much, but some. But what if I ain't rich or handsome? You'll be happy with me. How can you help it? I'll keep you merry as a lark all the day, pullin' jokes on you like—"

"Say!" Mehitable cut in. "Is *this* the important thing you brought me all the way out here to tell me? You had me mystified as to what it was you had up your sleeve, and that's why I come. But—why, let me tell you something, you thirty-third degree idiot, you: if I'd supposed for a minute that you was entertaining thoughts of matrimony about me, I'd have drove you off about your business long ago. Do you see this?"

She stepped back sudden like, and we could see, as well as Len Hickey, that she was holding a short-barreled shotgun in her hand.

"I brought this out here with me to-night," she tells him, "to use on you if you sprung another one of them whiskered wheezes of yours on me. Do you know, or don't you, that they're all I've been listening to for the past twenty-two years? My father's exactly the same kind of a would-be comic that you are. That's why he ain't got a friend in this part of the country, or any other. And that's why I've been ostracized with him into the desert. Yet you talk about me *marrying* you, and dooming myself to a whole lifetime of mental torture listening to you—"

She choked up and broke off. There was the mournful whistle of the nine-eleven in the distance. She fell back another step and lifted the butt of the shotgun to her shoulder, with the muzzle of it pointing square at Hickey's head.

"When this freight pulls up here for water," she tells him, "one of two things is going to happen. Either you're going to crawl on the bumpers and ride out of this county and State, never to return, or the gun is going off, and your worthless nut with it. I'll leave it to you to decide which it's going to be. Now" — as the train slowed up beside 'em — "take your choice."

And Len Hickey took it. When the freight pulled away from the water-tank, it took him with it—riding the beam for parts unknown.

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"Why, it's only this," says Walt. "It seems to me you're naturally goin' to get her 'yes' when you ask for it bein' the kind of a fella you are. Always merry and bright—them's the lads the gals loves best. Just you keep right on crackin' your jokes, the same as you have with us, when you're around her. Show her that married life with you is goin' to be one continuous minstrel show. And she'll be yours whenever you want her."

"That's straight goods, is it?" says the bow-legged, goggle-eyed shorty, thoughtful. "About gals likin' a fella who's full of comical stuff—like me?"

"Surest thing you know!" Walt guarantees it to him.

"Well, you've had more experience than I have with the sect," says Hickey. "Anybody has, for I ain't had none at all before this. So I'll take your word for it. Heretofore, I ain't pulled more'n a couple of the good gags I remember on her, just in passin' like. Somehow, when I looked into them eyes o' hern, I didn't feel like foolin' none—"

"The very worst thing you could do!" Walt quickly tells him. "You don't want to be serious with her. She'll give you the gate if you do. Cut loose, and show her that you're a natural born comedian. I've got your best interests at heart, along with the other boys, who'd like to see you cop out this gal; and so I want you to promise me that you'll change your tactics with her from now on. Keep feedin' her a line of anecdotes and quips as fast as you can think of 'em, and without a let-up. Will you do it?"

"I sure will!" says Len Hickey. "And thanks for tippin' me off!"

At different times during the next week and a half he had occasion to tell the rest of us the same thing—that he was grateful to us for setting him on the right track to win the heart and hand of old man Pearsall's only daughter.

For ten days we lived in something approaching peace. Len Hickey didn't crack more'n a scattering few of his jokes around us during that time. He saved 'em up to spring on the prairie flower he'd set his heart on plucking when he visited her.

Every evening, now that we'd tumbled to the fact that he was courting Pearsall's gal, he rode over to their shack that stood alone in the wilderness on the other side of town—for a good and sufficient reason which you're going to hear about in just a couple of minutes more.

It was a little after nine o'clock one night—a full two hours ahead of the time he usually returned from his sparking—when he come galloping back to the ranch like as if a scalping-party of Sioux was after him.

"What's the matter with that old Pearsall coyote?" he gasps at us when we streamed out of the bunk-house to investigate the cause of his precipitate and untimely reappearance. "Is the reason he don't seem to have a friend or acquaintance amongst anybody in these parts that he's crazy? And if that's it, why didn't you put me wise to it before?"

"Why, what's happened?" Pete Bolus asks him, innocent.

"What's happened?" Len blurts, casting an apprehensive look over his shoulder behind him. "He's just threatened to take my life with a .44 in one hand and a meat cleaver in the other, that's all! And he would have murdered me, too, if I hadn't got out of the house and into the saddle in two bounds and rode safe out of his reach."

"What did you do to rile him?" Walt inquired.

"Not a thing! On the contrary," says Len Hickey, "I was tryin' my best to entertain him. The fact is—er—to-night's the night I've set to ask Mehitable if she don't think Hickey 'd be a shorter and easier last name for her to write than Pearsall. When I turned up there this evenin', I was lucky enough to get a chance for a word with her alone. I asked her to meet me by the water-tank at the railroad tracks in an hour's time. I told her there was somethin' important I wanted to speak to her about.

"Well, she agreed to slip away and meet me there. Ever since I've been callin' on her, that old galoot, her father, has sat right into every one of our conversations. He thought he was somethin' of a story-

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After that, the rest of us took our turn at finding salt in the sugar-bowl when we went to sweeten our Java, or a chopped-up whisk-broom between our blankets.

The time had come for us to do something desperate. But what was there we could do?

"We could go to the boss and hand him our ultimatum," Al Enright summed it up, "by tellin' him to sack this temptation to homicide he's sicked on to us, or we'll quit in a body. But that would only be passin' the buck on to the gang at the next outfit where he'd turn up. It might not effect his lastin' reformation. The way I see it, it's a duty we owe to the rest of humanity to do that, if we can. We'd ought to fix this jackass, once and for all, so's he won't never be a disturber of the peace of his fella men no more. And we can hit on the way to do it, too, if we all get together and think hard enough."

But by the end of another two weeks it seemed that Al had flattered us all, himself included, on the amount of brains we had. We hadn't been able to think of no way to sober up Len Hickey permanently.

One evening Walt Marshall come tearing into the corral with that cayuse of his in a lather.

"I've got it!" he yells, waving his quirt at us. "The way to put the quietus on that Hickey varmint!"

"Well, spill it!" says Pete, while the rest of us flocked around Walt. "You're safe talkin' now. He ain't nowheres around to hear you."

"You bet I know he ain't around the outfit right now!" Walt cuts in, all excitement. "But I'll lay a little two to one there ain't none of *you* that knows, or can come close to guessin', where he is at this minute. Can you, now?"

"The boss sent him to town on an errand—" begins Al.

"And when he finished it he rode over to Gabe Pearsall's! I've made inquiries," Walt goes on, "and found out that he's been a pretty regular caller there for the last three weeks. He's stuck on Pearsall's gal, Mehitable. It's a fact. Don't you see now all it's up to us to do? Egg him on—"

"Maybe," puts in Pete in an awed voice —"maybe it 'd work, at that. You mean, don't you, for us to encourage him in his wooin' of the gal, and trust to his bein' too busy with his love-makin' to have time to spring any gags or play any of his practical jokes on us—"

"I don't mean that at all!" Walt snapped him up. "All of you listen to me, and I'll tell you what I *do* mean!"

When Walt got through talking, we drew back and looked at him with admiration shining forth undisguised from our eyes.

"But don't he know about Gabe?" Ed Hunter questions, doubtful like.

"He don't, bein' a stranger in this neighborhood," says Walt, positive. "And it 'll be up to us to keep him from gettin' wise to it until it's too late. I've already told a couple of folks I met on my way back here what I had in mind to do, and asked 'em to be careful they didn't say nothin' to Hickey that would tip him off. You do the same thing, and pump him full of the line of talk I've explained. We'll cure him to a fare-you-well this time, or I miss my guess!"

An hour later, when Len Hickey come cantering into the corral, Walt started right in on him.

"I seen you over at Pearsall's this afternoon," says he. "You've got a quick eye for a pretty face, haven't you?"

The amateur jokesmith colors up and laughs — flustered for the first time since he'd come amongst us.

"Mehitable's a dern nice gal," Walt goes on, shaking his head at him earnest. "And the fella who cops her will be one lucky guy. I s'pose you'd figger I was buttin' into your personal affairs if I was to put you wise to the best way to go about makin' a hit with her, so I reckon I'll keep my mouth shut—"

"No. Go ahead and tell me!" says the poor fish, falling into the trap. "I — I don't mind admittin' that I've fell, and fell hard, for that little gal. I ain't had much experience around women. So any advice you can give me that 'll help me to win her will be appreciated. Go on and tell me what you was goin' to say."

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had a merry answer for any question you asked him.

For instance, some of us might want to know if he thought it was going to rain. He'd look up at the sky, studying like, while he'd ram his hand down into his jeans.

"Why, no," he'd say; "I don't feel no change in my pocket!"

Or again, he'd be asked to pass the butter while we was at grub. He'd nod, without making a move for the dish.

"That's what I always do, without trifling with 'em none," he'd declare. "You see, I had an uncle once that was killed by a goat!"

Listening to a bunch of stuff like that, day in and day out, would have been enough to break down the constitution of one of them iron dogs the small-town banker used to have standing in the grounds around his "mansion."

We tried having a heart-to-heart talk with him.

"What makes you carry on this way?" Walt Marshall says to him, plaintive, one night. "Me, I like a joke as well as the next fella. A joke, y'understand, that *is* one. From the line of wheezes you've been pullin' on us for 'most two weeks now, I reckon you must think we've all been stealin' *Rip Van Winkle's* stuff for the last twenty years. If you must try to be the end-man with this outfit, give us a gag that wasn't stale when Noah was sailin' toy boats in his old man's bath-tub. Or give us a rest. One thing or the other."

"But why," put in Pete Bolus—"why d'ye think you've got to appoint yourself the merry little sunbeam of this bunch, anyhow?"

The pest giggles, foolish like, to himself.

"I guess I'm one of these fellas that sees the funny side of everything," says he. "I don't see how you can blame me for tryin' to pass a laugh on to somebody else."

"Believe me," Al Enright spoke up, "you've got two more guesses comin' to you about that. If you can see a joke, I'm the president of China!"

"Well, I can see one now," says the shrimp, looking at Al with another one of them silly giggles of his to take the sting out of the comeback.

Al got up and started for him. Then he turned around, with a hollow groan, and sat down again.

"If you was only six inches taller and about forty pounds heavier," he tells Len Hickey, "I bet I'd make you see that your attempts to be funny are about as welcome around here as a touch of cholera. Dry up for a while, can't you? Or can't you?"

He couldn't. That was the long and the short of it. It wasn't in him to keep his yawp from going, morning, noon, and night. And all we could do was to listen to him and suffer.

Ed Hunter made a suggestion that looked like a solution to our problem. He come back from a trip to town after the mail with a pound bar of beeswax and a couple of rolls of cotton that he proposed we stuff our ears with, which would prevent us from hearing the fella's almanac catches, so long as we couldn't stop him from making 'em.

That might have worked out all right. Only we didn't have a chance to test it. For just then our luck with the fella changed.

It got worse. The fact that he wasn't exactly knocking us off our seats in gales of laughter with his efforts as a rawcontoor, had at last got through even Len Hickey's solid ivory dome. And so he switched to physical humor.

Ed Hunter himself was the first victim. The nut sneaked up in back of him and slapped a wad of chewing gum into his hair. Loud and prolonged laughter was the reward of that bit of high-class comedy. Only it come at the wrong time—while Ed was holding the author of the prank over his knees and walloping him with a hobble-stake.

Leastways, anybody else but Len Hickey would have thought the laugh come in at the wrong place. But what does he do when Ed let go of him but shake the tears out of his eyes and join in our guffaws.

If you'll believe me, he was such a hopeless case that he was actually willing to take a beating any time in order to get a chuckle over his antics!

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fired him from it. It was a four-legged individual that had done that. A bronc that Cal had bet Al Enright six bits he could ride twice around the corral had pitched him twenty feet over his laid-back ears, busting Cal's collar-bone and three of his ribs, besides damaging some of his internal machinery.

The reports that had come from the hospital in Tucson, where the boss himself had taken Cal on a bed of blankets in the buckboard, had kept us on the anxious seat for three weeks and more.

Due to whatever it was he'd broke inside him, it 'd been a fifty-fifty bet during all that time as to whether Cal would live or die. And if Cal Hoover cashed in, just one dozen of his former coworkers was going to lose the best friend any of 'em ever had.

The doctors had passed the word that he was out of danger at last, though, only a couple of days before this bandy-legged, pop-eyed runt showed up amongst us, and that had perked up our spirits some. But we'd gone around with our mouths pulled down so long that the mournful kinks hadn't had time to get worked out of our face muscles.

We needed somebody to cheer us up. So we figgered ourselves in luck when the sawed-off stranger introduced himself to us as a card the very first minute he'd tossed his saddle and blanket-roll into his bunk.

"Well," was the way he started conversational advances, "I see they ain't had no communication by mail or phone or telegraph from Washington now for over two weeks."

"No?" Pete Bolus bit. "And why's that?"

"Why, Washington's been dead for more'n a century!" the coot shot back at him.

Then he doubled up, slapping the dust out of his angora chaps with a laugh that must have led folks a mile away to think the circus had come to town four months ahead of the season, and it was feeding-time for the hyenas.

He sobered up long enough to throw at Pete:

"I reckon you didn't even know he was sick, did you?"

And then he was off again.

Right there, if we'd had the sense the Lord gave a one-winged gnat, we'd have known what we was up against. If by no other signs, you can spot one of them try-to-be-comical cusses every time by the fact that they always laugh the loudest and longest over their own alleged humorous cracks.

And what we should have done was to treat them initial attempts of his to be witty with the frowning silence they deserved, instead of grinning at 'em as we did. That way, he wouldn't have been encouraged none to elect himself the life of our party.

For one solid hour after that the darn fool kept his mouth going—firing one joke after another at us in an endeavor to live up to the reputation he figgered he'd made with us.

And such jokes as they was! The last book of drummers' yarns he'd dipped into must have been published in 1842. You know the one about a green tomato being like an old maid because it's hard "to mate 'er." So does everybody in the United States over seven years old who can read and write.

Well, he gave us that one, laughing fit to unhinge a couple of his ribs when he got off the point of it. And he dug up the other about the Englishman that was told death is like a tin can tied to a dog's tail "because it's bound to occur," who balled up the joke when he got it off by saying it's bound to "a dog."

Bright and early next morning he was at it again. Riddles, puns, and gags that the most of us had been rocked to sleep by—he dragged 'em into every conversation.

By the next evening we'd changed our minds completely about thinking that his arrival in any way signified that we was the favorite sons of the blind goddess.

At the end of a week there was just one worse hated person around the outfit than Len Hickey. That was the boss, for inflicting him on us.

He wasn't silent or serious a minute. He

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Curing the Cut-Up

by Ben Duncan

SOMEWHERE in this favored land, as the poet says, hearts are light and folks are smiling; but Len Hickey ain't one of 'em.

No. Wherever he is to-day, I'm willing to bet he's known as the Human Hangnail. He never cracks a smile at any joke that's told in his hearing. And as for getting off one himself—a million dollars couldn't tempt him to try to pull a funny line.

And yet there was a guy that once thought he was a born comedian. It would be Foolish Question No. 679,432 for me to ask you if you've ever run across a would-be cut-up such as Len Hickey used to be. The fool killer's swung his club at one of them nuisances and missed him in every community.

He's the fella who thinks it's a side-splitting piece of humor to smack you between the shoulder-blades with enough force to make you lose either your hat or your breath when he meets you, while he whoops that he's glad to see you're *back* again. Whenever anything falls with a clatter, like a pile of dishes, he can't resist trying to get a laugh out of some one of the bystanders by hollering, "You'll find it on the floor!"

Oh, yes—and he always says "What can I 'do' you for?" instead of "What can I do for you?"

Speaking for myself personally, I ain't got a single thing against any one of the breed. If I did have, I'd send him to jail for life.

He'd be getting off light, at that, considering the crimes him and his kind has committed against the nerves and the peace of mind of them as has had to put up with their society for any space of time.

That was the kind of a Merry Andrew this Hickey person was. He was really about as funny as an artificial limb, but he didn't know it.

Leastways, he hadn't got wise to himself when he first turned up on the Bar-Eleven ranch. Later on—but wait 'll I tell you.

You know what a blessing in disguise is. It's something you wouldn't have happen to you for the world, like being hit by a trolley-car, until you wake up on the floor of the corner drug-store to find that you ain't been hurt a mite, and there's a claim-agent standing by to hand you five hundred dollars for signing a statement that you release the company from all responsibility.

Well, Len Hickey was the exact reverse of that. What I mean to say is, we looked on him as a valuable addition to our number when the boss led him out to the bunk-house and spilled the information to us that this was the new cow-hand he'd picked up in town to fill Cal Hoover's place.

The low state of mind we'd been left in by Cal's going was responsible for that.

Cal Hoover hadn't quit his job with the Bar-Eleven, and nobody on two legs had

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the stern principles of the man, she wondered if even for her he would violate a trust.

Just then voices floated up from an approaching car. Julia straightened, and the sudden movement brushed Lansdowne's arm from her shoulder. They had been so absorbed that they had forgotten their attitude.

Julia's rising color was reflected in the young attorney's face.

The first automobile was followed by many others; and the party started with dancing. When Julia was at last forced to introduce Cole to Betsy Rose, she saw at once that here was an unusual combination of temperaments. She left them together to work out the combination for themselves and went to ask her father about some confetti he had promised to bring for one of the dances.

But she had been puzzled by an apparent nervousness in Cole's manner when he had first greeted her. Could it be that the brother of Mrs. Marbridge shared Tom's ominous secret?

Julia had secured the confetti and was returning to the tennis-courts when she heard a quiet voice.

"Miss Wharton, one moment, please," it said.

She was passing through the thicket of spruce-trees leading from the Italian garden, where she had found her father smoking with a couple of friends. And now, as she turned in astonishment, she beheld a wiry figure wiggling from between twin trunks.

In the dim light cast by a distant lantern, Julia recognized the personality rather than the person of Philip Paget.

"How dare you come here at a time like this?" she blazed, furious at the man's impudence.

"This is the evening I told Miss Wharton that, should I receive no answer from her, she would receive one from me."

"My father is only a little way off," she threatened.

"Will Miss Wharton call?"

He waited, then mocked her inaction with a shrug.

"Miss Wharton," he continued, "I have been most lenient in this affair; indeed, most patient. But my patience has given out. Here Miss Wharton may read in advance what the public will feast on to-morrow."

He held forth a folded periodical.

"However, since this is an advance copy, I can kill that paragraph to-night—if Miss Wharton will pay me fifteen thousand dollars."

With a gesture of repugnance she rejected the paper and it fell at her feet.

"You will leave these grounds at once," she ordered. "Do you hear—at once! Or you will find yourself under arrest."

"In that case I hope I shall enjoy the pleasure of meeting Miss Wharton in court."

Julia, inwardly quivering, more from nervous intensity than physical fear, started away. Paget took a cautious step after her.

"My alternative is refused?"

"Absolutely."

"Then I'll have a copy of to-morrow's *Gadfly* sent with my compliments. As for that one"—he pointed to where the folded periodical still lay on the path—"does Miss Wharton think it wise to leave such entertaining literature for her guests to read?"

"Will you go?" warned Julia.

"If there's nothing to be gained by staying," he replied significantly.

She watched his figure, even in its gait expressing guilt, shamble off between the trees. When she was convinced that he had actually gone, Julia returned, picked up the paper, and, beneath one of the low-swung lanterns, examined it hastily.

On the opening page she found a paragraph heavily ringed with blue-pencil. Then hot waves of color surging from throat to brow, by the faint illumination she managed to read:

> A well-known case now holding Society's attention has taken on added vitality. It is rumored that a certain débutante, whose ancestral acres border the Monroe Pike, could give an accurate description of a woman whom the police are seeking. Needless to say, the débutante is silent.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

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She wanted very much to question the detective, but, on account of the vast acreage of the estate, she could not decide where to look for him. Of course he was keeping under cover until the party should begin. As she mounted the front steps a girl came along the veranda to greet her.

"Hello, Julia!" cried Betsy Rose.

Miss Rose typified her family name. She was plump and deliciously pink, with a curled bud mouth and great blue eyes.

"Oh, hello, Betsy!" exclaimed Julia, kissing the glowing lips. "So glad you came early."

"I thought I might help you," offered Betsy.

"Everything's done except the entertaining."

"That's no work for you," attested Julia's neighbor. "Any new men coming to-night?"

Julia laughed. Betsy had a decided dash of coquetry in her make-up.

"Do say you have at least one," she pleaded.

"There's a brand new one."

The words were out before Julia gave them a thought.

Betsy, always exhilarated at the prospect of conquest, asked impetuously:

"Who is he?"

"Albert Cole."

Julia felt a sudden reluctance to have her best friend meet Cole. She knew that Betsy was susceptible and Cole was good-looking. And as yet she was undecided as to his real character. She felt it wiser not to enhance the young man with mystery in Betsy's romantic eyes, so she did not mention his relation to Maud Marbridge.

Betsy, therefore, quite ignorant of the fact that she was strewing sparks near a fuse, announced graciously that she intended to be "very nice" to Albert Cole.

While the girls were still talking, Tom Lansdowne arrived, and Betsy, who, ten minutes before had been told by Mrs. Wharton that there was nothing she could do, thoughtfully retired to see if the mistress of Pinecrest needed her. Tom took advantage of these few minutes alone with his fair hostess.

There were a great many things he wanted to say which, had he been a poet, he would have uttered thus:

"You're the prettiest girl in the world, my dear"; "In that cloudy pink you look like some twinkling star"; "Your hair is a scented mist."

But with the average American's aversion to spoken sentiment, he exclaimed nonchalantly: "Great night, isn't it?"

And Julia, thrilling at the avowal in his eager gaze, answered flippantly: "Great, if it doesn't rain."

For after all this dryad had been brought up in the strictest society manner.

Then, because, poet or no poet, Tom feared he might break into rhapsodies, he retreated to the stronghold of every-day professionalism.

"You wanted to hear the latest in the Marbridge case, didn't you, Julia?"

For three hundred seconds she had forgotten the Marbridge case absolutely. Now, with revulsion, as though some blast from a noisome pit had uprisen to smite her, she shrank back.

"Yes."

The word was almost inarticulate.

"Well, there's a great new development—something that will hit society like a thunderbolt if it ever comes out."

Julia, gripping a sob which struggled from her innermost being, swayed toward the man, leaning against the balustrade beside her.

"Why, my dear girl, what's the matter?"

The average American merged into a very solicitous person, who rested one arm gently about the slender figure next him.

"I—I'm all right," she murmured.

"But you're not. Aren't you well?"

"Of course. I've had a strenuous day; that's all."

"You should have rested," he said reprovingly.

"But, Tom, what is this exciting development you speak of?"

"I'm not at liberty to tell just yet. But as soon as possible you shall certainly know."

As soon as possible, she would certainly know! Could it concern herself—this secret? If it really affected her welfare, surely Tom would tell her now. Yet aware of

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the table near the door of the Ten Eyck dining-room on Tuesday night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE GADFLY.

IT was the evening of the lawn fête.

Julia ran down the path between hedges of rhododendron toward the tennis-courts, where floors had been laid for dancing. Her mother had supervised most of the arrangements. But Julia had selected the bower where punch was to be served, and she wanted to see that each detail accorded with her directions.

She wore a gown of pink tulle, touched here and there with silver trimmings; and as she ran, she looked like a fleeing dryad. Though no mortal eye could behold her tormentor, Julia was none the less pursued. For the threat of undesirable publicity shadowed even this festive occasion.

When Miss Wharton had satisfied herself that the refreshment booth was just as she had specified, she started back toward the house. Some distance away, in the indistinct light of one of the Japanese lanterns, strung along the path, she saw a man's figure standing motionless.

Julia halted; an instinctive dread of solitary figures looming at unexpected moments possessed her. The man came forward rapidly.

"Miss Julia, I wanted to see you." It was Charles.

"Well, Charles?" Julia's relief was evident in her tones.

"There's somebody on the grounds who says he's a private detective. But he won't tell me any more about himself. I wanted to chuck him out, only he said to give you his name and it would be all right."

"What is his name?" Julia asked quickly.

"Nagle."

In the faint glow Charles tried to observe her expression.

"Where is he now?"

"Can't tell you exactly. I happened on him about twenty minutes ago coming through the woods. He seemed so cocksure about you letting him stay that I didn't like to kick him out before I'd asked you."

Julia was silent.

Charles glowered. There seemed to be a lot of rascals prying around Pinecrest these days. If she wouldn't let him bounce them, he couldn't be held responsible for what they might do.

Still the girl did not speak.

"Miss Julia, I think I'll have to go to your father about this man," Charles remarked almost sullenly.

"Oh, no, Charles!" Julia found utterance at last, and a most vehement utterance it was. "I forbid your mentioning this fellow to father."

The fellow's big fists clenched.

"But don't you see, Miss Julia; if anything goes wrong, he'll come back on me?"

"If anything should happen, I'll take the blame," said Julia desperately.

"All right, Miss Julia." He stood aside to let her pass.

But the buoyancy had gone from her step. She could not comprehend why, after the police had practically dismissed her, they should send Nagle to spy upon her actions, although this was what she had feared they would do.

Yet the suspicion seemed so contradictory to Walters's deferential treatment of the daughter of Barclay Wharton, that Julia began to wonder if the detective could have come to keep watch over one of the Pinecrest guests. If so, which one?

Surely, there had been no one invited this evening who was directly implicated in the Marbridge case. She went over the possibilities. There was Tom Lansdowne. As attorney for Mrs. Marbridge, would his movements be of interest to the police? She hardly believed that they would go to the trouble of shadowing Tom.

There was only one other person in any way connected with the affair: Albert Cole. To Julia his presence on the scene of the shooting called for an explanation; but the girl inferred that Walters as yet entertained no suspicions of the brother of Maud Marbridge. Besides, she had given Cole such a tardy and altogether impromptu invitation that she doubted if Nagle even knew he was to be present.

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felt a chill of horror creep along her spine. To have her picture appear at this time for curious eyes to observe, and perhaps identify as "the link" in the Marbridge tangle, would be very nearly as risky as having the *Gadfly* surreptitiously score her in print.

In the background of her consciousness was the fact that one of the men diners at a table of four had scrutinized her closely on the night she had entered the Ten Eyck. Suppose he should recognize her picture in the paper?

She spoke positively.

"If you desire details regarding the lawn fête, I shall be glad to give them to you; but I cannot let you have my photograph."

"Why not?" the other wheedled. "Surely there is no reason why a young woman of your charming—"

"I have no recent photograph." Julia suddenly recalled that her mother had made this excuse.

But the reporter was trained for such emergencies. Crossing to a corner table, she whipped up a lovely likeness of the girl, which she had located soon after admittance to the room.

"Why not this one?"

Julia frowned.

"That was taken two years ago especially for my father."

"You've been abroad four years, haven't you?" the woman remarked.

At the moment Julia did not find the inquiry significant, and she answered readily: "I sent him that from London."

"Our engraver would be careful. He would return the picture in good condition."

"I shouldn't care to have you use it," said Julia with a note of finality. "Do you wish anything about the fête?"

"Indeed I do," announced the reporter, grinning what she meant to be a smile of ingratiation.

"Excuse me a few moments, then, and I'll get mother's notes. She's ordered all the decorating."

Julia returned promptly. She was amazed at the rapidity with which the newspaper woman absorbed descriptions. In less than ten minutes her visitor was gone. Intensely relieved that the episode was over, Julia was about to leave the room when her glance strayed to the corner table.

The silver frame, which had held her photograph, was empty.

For a full moment amazement held her captive. Then she ran to the window and looked down the driveway. The woman who had stolen her photograph was nowhere in sight. There was a side entrance to Pinecrest leading through the woods. Evidently the culprit had chosen this as the route offering concealment in case of pursuit.

Julia thought desperately: Who was the creature?

Suddenly she recalled the terrifying fact that the woman had stated rather than asked: "You were abroad four years."

Did she hold a secret menace? Could she be an impostor connected in some way with the group of schemers who seemed bent on destroying the good name of Julia Wharton? There was but one way of satisfying her mind on this point.

Julia went at once to the phone and called up the *Ledger* office. In response to her inquiry, the city editor informed her that he had sent a reporter to Pinecrest to ask for Miss Wharton's picture.

Julia hesitated. Although she considered the woman's act despicable, she had been taught from childhood that it was a form of crime for a wealthy man or woman, through malice, to force a person who earned his or her own bread, out of employment. And now, though she realized the weight a word from the daughter of Barclay Wharton would have with this city editor, she forbore to use that weapon.

"There's been a mistake about the picture which your representative secured," she stated. "Please do not use it."

"But, Miss Wharton—" the man began when she interrupted:

"I must insist that you do not print my photograph, and that you return it to me at once."

She put back the receiver, congratulating herself that her strategy had outmeasured that of the other.

But the important fact that Julia did not know was that the reporter from the *Ledger* had been one of the party of four sitting at

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"And sometimes it wrecks the lives of people who are not guilty."

She spoke vehemently.

"That is why conventions were founded, I suppose," rejoined Lansdowne. "Conventions are chiefly for women."

Julia was tying her handkerchief into hard little knots. After a pause she asked: "What will the police do next?"

"They intend to keep looking for this one link until they find her."

"You mean the woman?"

"Yes."

"But how can they identify her? Has Mr. Marbridge regained recollection of the occasion?"

"No," said Lansdowne regretfully. "The doctor is not sure he ever will. Just now they fear blood-poisoning."

Julia felt limp. The whole world seemed crashing down upon her.

"In regard to the elusive lady," Lansdowne went on blandly, "the police have exhausted two clues. The trails are closing in. Walters is sure that if only he can find the right woman, it will take but a moment to identify her."

"Why, but a moment?"

"On Tuesday evening, you remember, there was a storm. Marbridge was expecting the Chicago widow, and appeared restless while he waited. That was before the phone call, of course. The person who noticed all this naturally studied the face of the young woman whom Marbridge finally greeted."

"The person who noticed—who do you mean, Tom?"

"The head-waiter, naturally."

"Is that Walters's idea?"

"Yes."

This was the first time Julia knew definitely that Walters had seized on the head-waiter as a valuable witness.

"He has told her name?" Her voice trembled in spite of her.

"Her name?" Lansdowne smiled at the girl's excitement. "Why, Julia, if he knew her name, don't you suppose we'd have got hold of her long ago. But if we could confront her with him, he'd remember her face, all right."

As the girl cowered back against the stone balustrade, John emerged from the clump of spruce trees.

"Miss Julia," he said, "there's a lady at the house wants to see you on particular business."

"What kind of business, John?" asked the girl.

"She wouldn't tell her name or why she came. But she said she must see you."

Miss Wharton's color rose. She had reached that stage of nervous dread where she dare not deny herself to unknown callers, lest they employ some method of retaliation.

Lansdowne looked at his watch.

"By George, is it four o'clock, Julia? I'll have to run along. I have a date at five."

"Must you really go?"

Secretly she felt relief.

"Really."

"But come again—soon," offering her hand. "And Tom, the minute anything new develops in this exciting Marbridge case, please, please let me hear at once about it."

He went away, thinking what an intelligent helpmate Julia Wharton would make for an ambitious young man.

When the girl entered the drawing-room she beheld a thin, keen-faced woman who stood up alertly and inquired in high-pitched tones:

"Miss Wharton?"

"Yes?" Julia spoke interrogatively.

"I am from the *Ledger*," announced the stranger. "We would like a description of your lawn fête, Miss Wharton."

"It doesn't take place till Monday," announced Julia.

"We'd like to have information in advance. Also a picture, if possible."

"Somebody from your office called up my mother, and she told them she did not wish to have my picture in the paper."

"That is why I came personally. The *Ledger* wanted to run it on Sunday; but now, of course, it's too late. In view of the fact that you've just made your début, we thought you wouldn't mind giving us a picture for Monday evening."

Julia, who had been grateful that her mother had refused extravagant publicity,

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"I don't know what you're driving at," he said bluntly.

"That's because you won't understand."

He stared at her. Was it possible that petulant speech could be uttered by the same girl who, a few moments before, had typified glowing good humor?

Julia, her pretty lips drooping, was gazing off between the spruce-trees.

Could it make any real difference to her, he wondered, whether he, a hard-working young attorney, devoted much or little time to other women?

Tom moved a fraction nearer. Julia was already huddled against the end of the bench, but she kept her eyes straight ahead.

"Listen, Julia. In these days of commercial warfare the combatants use strange tactics. One has to be constantly alert to forestall their moves. Mrs. Marbridge is an exceedingly intelligent woman, and she recognizes this fact. She has been helping me immensely on the case. That's all."

But Julia was not convinced. She meant, if possible, without actually alluding to the matter, to make Tom explain that ride to Tilton.

"You have so little time for your friends," she went on. "Suppose I had wanted you for tennis yesterday afternoon. Could you have come?"

"Yesterday afternoon," Tom reflected. "No," he said at length; "yesterday I had to go out to Tilton."

"If you'd stopped by, I might have ridden over with you, Mr. Thomas Lansdowne. It was a glorious day."

There was a pretense of lightness in her tone.

"Why, I—Mrs. Marbridge had some important information for the authorities."

"Oh!" The girl's hands clenched in her lap.

"We went to see the county prosecutor," he further explained.

"Was this about—about the woman she suspects?"

Lansdowne regarded her keenly.

"Did Mrs. Marbridge mention that to you?"

Julia nodded.

Satisfied that he was not betraying a confidence, the attorney explained:

"Among her husband's possessions, Mrs. Marbridge found a note in regard to that evening at the Ten Eyck. Not the sort of note which would prove valuable in court. But at least it proves that a friendship existed between Marbridge and this widow. She's from Chicago, and evidently very wealthy."

"Mrs. Marbridge mentioned some one who lived in London."

"It's this same one. She spent several years in Paris. Then, at the time the war broke out, she hurried to London. Marbridge met her there."

"I see," exclaimed Julia hopefully. "So your client believes this is the corespondent she is seeking?"

"After finding the note," continued Lansdowne, "she called me up for conference, and we decided it would be best to place this information in the hands of the police. We motored out to Tilton—"

"Yes?"

"And put the matter before Walters. He thought it a good clue, so he turned it over to Nagle."

"Nagle!" echoed Julia sharply.

Lansdowne's professional absorption blurred the intensity with which she repeated that name.

"Yes. He's the Pinkerton man employed on the case. Well, Nagle hunted up the widow, found her last night in a New York hotel, and what do you suppose?"

"What?" Julia tingled with curiosity.

"He says she established an alibi for last Tuesday night. On account of the storm she'd phoned Marbridge that she wouldn't meet him at the tavern."

Julia's breath came quickly.

"We're up against the same old query," the lawyer went on. "Who was the mysterious lady at the Ten Eyck?"

"What do you think she's guilty of?" she asked.

"At least of indiscretion. Can't you see for yourself how it looks, Julia?"

"Oh, I see! But people have no right to attack a person's character simply because appearances are against her."

"That's what we call circumstantial evidence. Often it is correct."

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Why not invite him to the lawn fête?

"Mr. Cole?"

"Hello?"

"Mother's giving a little lawn party on Monday night. Can you come?"

"Assuredly."

"Good-by, then; I'll see you Monday."

"Good-by."

She hung up. Then she blanched; for she suddenly grew apprehensive that the other person Paget had in mind to inform was Mrs. Reginald Marbridge.

"I can fight Paget," Julia whispered to herself desperately. "But I can't fight a woman; especially a jealous woman!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CHICAGO WIDOW.

THE tennis-court at Pinecrest was bounded by a thicket of spruce-trees beyond which lay an Italian garden. After a close game, in which Lansdowne finally won the honors, Julia led the way to the garden and dropped on the stone bench.

"Tired?" he asked, seating himself beside her.

She looked up and smiled. Exercise had flushed her cheeks and rumpled her shining dark hair. Her lips, very red, were parted. The girl had not appeared so radiant for many days.

Lansdowne, watching her, felt a sudden whim to reach over and rumple her hair still more. The fact that his logical brain could not account for the impulse troubled him an instant. Then he stiffened, folded his arms resolutely, and waited for her to speak.

"It was a great set, wasn't it?" she said, settling back in the corner of the seat.

"Indeed it was. You're in good form, Julia."

"Oh, that comes from my English playing. I meant to keep it up when I came back."

"And have you been practising every day?"

She shook her head. "Too busy."

Lansdowne laughed.

"Pray, what can engross a princess of leisure?"

"Her royalty," said Julia airily.

But a little pucker of pain rippled her smooth brow.

Lansdowne had unconsciously recalled the banshee which haunted Julia's waking hours. She suddenly realized how all the festive plans she had made abroad had been sucked into this whirlpool of impending scandal—a scandal in which she was entirely innocent, save for the misfortune of having blundered into it.

When Lansdowne had arrived that Saturday afternoon she had brought up the Marbridge case at once. She was anxious to learn how the wounded man was faring, and also why Tom Lansdowne should have chased out to Tilton the previous afternoon with his decidedly good-looking client.

But Tom, exuding energy, had waived the subject and proposed a game of tennis. As soon as she had started to play, Julia's athletic instincts asserted themselves. In the exhilaration of contest she had temporarily forgotten her dilemma. But here it was again, large as life, perching fantom-like between them.

Julia kicked an unoffending pebble as far as she could, stooped to pick up another, knocked her tennis-racket off the bench, bent to reach for it and brushed a stray curl across the cheek of her guest, also making an effort to recover the racket.

"Pardon me," stammered Lansdowne.

"Pardon me!" murmured Julia.

The head-foremost attitude had brought a rush of blood to both faces.

"Julia—" the man began.

"Tom!" exclaimed Julia, alarmed at an inward trepidation which threatened her conventional poise, "Mrs. Marbridge seems to depend a great deal upon you."

"Oh, I don't know," returned Lansdowne formally.

The gossamer fabric which an instant before had seemed to shut them into a world peculiarly their own, was now broken.

"I understand that she demands a lot of your time," the girl continued.

"Professionally, perhaps. Any law case to be won requires considerable research."

"Into femininity?" she inquired.

Once more he flushed.

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her hands, but she retained her self-control. She felt as though she would like to strangle the man. But she realized that she must neither admit nor deny any of his allegations.

He was indubitably acting as a go-between for William Vaughan Spears. His pretended knowledge of her clandestine visit to the editor of the *Gadfly* proved that beyond the peradventure of a doubt.

Julia was completely convinced that he was no more certain than was Spears himself of the identity of the editor's veiled caller. She determined to bring the disagreeable interview to as speedy a close as possible.

"I've listened to all the insinuations and threats I care to," she blazed, turning to leave.

Paget's manner underwent a rapid change.

"I stand quite ready," he returned "to use more than insinuations and threats. For instance, I might inform two people who are vitally interested in the Marbridge case, just where a certain young lady was on Tuesday night. Unless—"

"Unless?"

"Miss Wharton pays over to me the sum of fifteen thousand dollars!"

She forced an ironical smile to her lips.

"That's a small fortune in itself. You must fancy you have some very damaging information in your possession."

"*Mademoiselle* herself knows just how damaging it is."

"But *monsieur* does not know how damaging it would be to his own interests to continue annoying me!"

She started to walk away.

"I shall give *mademoiselle* till Monday night to decide," she heard him say. "Then—"

But she did not wait for the rest. She passed rapidly out to the road and through the gate of Pinecrest.

She must continue to defy Paget. Once she showed him, for a single, fleeting moment, that she was afraid of him, she would be in his power forever. And she imagined, too, that the sum he demanded would be only a fraction of what he might coerce her into giving him later.

Of course he would not dare let the *Gadfly* publish the articles he had written; of that she felt reasonably sure. But what was he threatening to do?

She entered the library, which was empty, and carefully burned the pieces of paper in her pocket. The phone bell rang as she finished.

"Could that be Philip Paget again?" Julia asked herself.

It was Albert Cole.

"I thought you were leaving town," she commented after he had given his name.

"I found it unnecessary," was his ready reply. "I'm glad for my sister's sake; she needs me now."

"How is she to-day?"

"More composed."

"And Mr. Marbridge—is he the same as usual?"

"Pretty much; when he's conscious he can't remember what happened on Tuesday night," he broke off. Then: "Miss Wharton?"

"Yes, Mr. Cole."

"I called you up this morning. I'd like to see you again, soon. May I take you out motoring to-morrow afternoon?"

"I'm afraid I can't go to-morrow. I'll be busy all day."

"Then the next day?"

Julia pondered.

She did not wish to be seen out alone with Cole, or to have him call on her at Pinecrest. At least not until the Marbridge mystery was cleared up. Her father would not countenance her associating with the brother of Maud Marbridge at present. Besides, she was not certain herself of what part he had played in the shooting.

But suddenly she realized, in consternation, that Albert Cole might be one of the two persons whom Paget meant to tell about her movements on Tuesday night. She must see more of Maud Marbridge's brother, in that case; he would be less likely to believe ill of her if she knew him better.

Also, if she met him and talked with him again, she would get in closer touch with what the police were doing. Perhaps she might even learn from him what had taken his sister to Tilton that day.

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Subconsciously, Julia completed Charles's broken sentence. She perceived that the chauffeur was offering to thrash Paget. His Irish blood was at the boiling-point. But she must, at any cost, prevent an encounter, and also keep the blackmailer from saying anything indiscreet in the presence of Charles.

"Will Miss Wharton see me a few moments?" Paget inquired.

The chauffeur was regarding him with a hostile air.

"I'll get rid of him, Charles," murmured the girl. "You'd better hurry off to meet father."

"As you wish, Miss Julia."

Charles fairly growled the words, casting a black look at Paget, who pretended not to notice him.

Julia alighted; and the chauffeur, once more bestowing on the man a scowl of disapproval, backed the car about and sped down the road.

When he was out of sight, Paget remarked dryly:

"Miss Wharton's chauffeur appears not overfond of me!"

Julia gazed at him coldly.

"Miss Wharton's chauffeur isn't," she rejoined, deliberately adopting his curiously indirect mode of address. "And the next time Mr. Paget dares to hold Miss Wharton up in this outrageous fashion, I imagine her chauffeur will run him down."

Anger flared up in the man's dark eyes.

"He'd better not attempt it, Miss Wharton; any more than his mistress had better continue her foolish policy of refusing to see me."

"What do you want of me?" Julia demanded scornfully.

"Miss Wharton knows in general," Paget said, once more with his accustomed urbanity. "But if she wishes me to go into details, I must entreat her to step with me through the hedge over there."

Paget pointed to an opening in the privet wall marking the outer boundary of an estate across from the Whartons's. It was there that he had been lurking while waiting for her.

What new information had he secured, Julia asked herself in alarm, which made him so much bolder than when she had last seen him? To find out, she would have to grant him the interview he solicited.

Above all else, she must not be seen talking to Paget in the middle of the road, especially by Detective Nagle. So she signed her willingness to hear what he had to say by crossing the road and passing through the hedge.

In the comparative privacy it afforded she faced him.

"Come to the point at once!" was her brusk demand.

He showed no disposition to parley.

"Miss Wharton has received my note?" he inquired.

Julia colored angrily, and drew the printed slip out of the pocket of her skirt. Then, slowly and while Paget watched her quietly, she tore it into fine bits and put them back into her pocket.

"That is my answer," she said.

"I notice," was Paget's caustic comment, "that Miss Wharton is careful not to leave the pieces about, where they might be found by some one."

She ignored the thrust.

"Even if what you wrote in that horrible article were true, every word of it, you wouldn't dare have it printed!"

"Wouldn't we?" Julia perceived the force of the man's deliberate use of the plural. "And we'd also be acting well within the law to run a photograph along with it.

"The daughter of Barclay Wharton," Paget went on, "is a semipublic figure. Of course, it would not be our fault if certain of our readers—and, yes, to be sure, the police—should put two and two together and—"

"Speaking of the police," Julia broke in heatedly, "what's to prevent my turning you over to them?"

Paget shrugged.

"Nothing—except that Miss Wharton would then be subjected to the kind of publicity from which she ought to shrink. *Mon Dieu,*" he added, as though in afterthought, "suppose the police should learn that Miss Wharton paid a visit to a certain magazine this morning."

Julia pressed her nails into the palms of

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home. But you didn't reach there until 1 A.M."

The three men exchanged quick glances.

"Well?" prompted Julia.

Young gave rather a vexed smile.

"Well, Miss Wharton, we thought you might have been near the scene of the Marbridge shooting at the time it occurred. And that you might be able to assist us in our investigations."

The sense of relief Julia felt was almost overpowering. So the county authorities had no tangible evidence of her having been with Marbridge on Tuesday night. Seemingly they had merely jumped to conclusions in the matter and were firing blindly.

For a second she suspected Tom Lansdowne of having in some way cast suspicion on her; but she immediately put the thought from her as odiously unfair to the young attorney.

Julia shook her head.

"No, I didn't get near the scene of the shooting that night. If I had, Mr. Young, don't you suppose I should have come to you at once?"

"Not necessarily," objected the prosecutor. "It would be extremely unpleasant for a young lady like yourself to be in any way associated with a case of this sort. For that reason I was very cautious in the way I approached you. First, I ordered Nagle not to be seen in your company. Then, I requested you to come here, because if I had gone in person or sent Nagle to Pinecrest, you might have been linked up with the affair. In Tilton you will be thought to be paying a fine."

The prosecutor's last words reminded Julia of Charles waiting with the car. She rose.

"I wish to thank you for your thoughtfulness," she said. "Is that all you want to ask me?"

"Yes, Miss Wharton."

He conducted her ceremoniously to the door. She nodded to the three men and passed out.

It was not until she reached the sidewalk that she suddenly realized, to her mystification, that he had said nothing to her about her strange movements in the city. She must have awakened Nagle's curiosity; and the Pinkerton man had surely told the prosecutor of her visit to the editorial rooms of the *Gadfly*.

She began to fear that Young had dismissed her only temporarily; that he would order Nagle to keep her under surveillance, at least, until the clue which Mrs. Marbridge had undoubtedly given him had been thoroughly investigated. Perhaps, after that, he might even want to cross-examine her!

CHAPTER XVI.

PAGET NAMES HIS PRICE.

JULIA found Charles fidgeting beside the limousine. He was consulting his watch.

"Am I late?" she asked.

"No, Miss Julia. You still have a couple of minutes to spare."

In spite of her worries, she smiled faintly at the chauffeur's ingenuousness, and climbed into the car.

Charles wasted no minutes along the road. From the speed he maintained, Julia judged, his protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, that he was a trifle behind time. Once she leaned forward and advised him, through the open front window, to let her off within walking distance of the estate.

But he shook his head.

"That's all right, Miss Julia," he expostulated, reading her thoughts. "I can take you all the way home."

They were going up a short hill near the entrance to Pinecrest, when Julia was startled to see a man leap out of a hedge flanking the road and step right in the path of the machine. Charles spied him barely in time to jam on the brakes and turn aside to avoid striking him.

The adroit maneuver brought Julia directly opposite the fellow, who lifted his hat. She gazed down into the suavely smiling visage of Philip Paget.

Charles recognized him instantly, and leaned back to whisper excitedly:

"That's the rascal who tried to pump me about you the other day, Miss Julia. Shall I—"

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to Tilton and back in time to go after father?"

His Irish eyes sparkled; obviously he had jumped at the fine-for-speeding hypothesis.

"Certainly, Miss Julia," he responded readily. "That is, if you don't stay in Tilton more than a quarter of an hour."

"Then all right, Charles."

She bundled into the car, and they were off. Arrived in the country seat, she requested Charles to stop about a block away from the court-house. She wanted to go there unaccompanied and on foot.

"If I'm not back in fifteen minutes," she told him, "don't wait for me."

When Julia drew near the court-house, she saw a man and a woman emerge and descend the steps toward a roadster at the curb. They were Tom Lansdowne and Mrs. Reginald Marbridge.

So narrowly did she escape running into them that she upbraided herself vigorously for her carelessness. She would not have been so much to blame if Tom had not told her of his frequent trips to Tilton. She might have anticipated meeting him.

But what was Mrs. Marbridge doing there?

The query opened a new avenue of conjecture.

Julia stepped behind a tree until Tom Lansdowne and Mrs. Marbridge drove away. Then she entered the court-house.

CHAPTER XV.

A BAFFLED PROSECUTOR.

IN the sheriff's office Julia found three men assembled. Nagle was one of them. The other two she did not know. They all rose as she entered.

"Miss Julia Wharton, Mr. Walters, and Mr. Young." The Pinkerton man made the introductions.

The sheriff was raw-boned and about forty, with dark hair and eyes. Young, on the other hand, had sparse, light hair and blue eyes.

The county prosecutor scrutinized Julia narrowly as she accepted the chair which Walters offered her.

"In the first place, Miss Wharton," Young said earnestly, "we wish to apologize for requesting you to come here. But we want you to feel it was necessary owing to the nature of the case."

Julia wondered what "case" he might be referring to.

"I imagine you must have had a good reason for it," was her rather banal reply. "Otherwise you wouldn't have been in such a hurry to get me here."

Young glanced quizzically at the sheriff. He apparently found it difficult to break into what he had to say. At last he inquired:

"Miss Wharton, you've been following the Marbridge case, haven't you?"

She felt her throat contract with fear. But she replied coolly enough:

"Yes, I've been reading about it in the newspapers."

Once more the county prosecutor shot a puzzled look at Walters. Nagle, too, seemed baffled. In a flash of intuition, it occurred to Julia that the county officials had probably been certain that she was the woman in the Marbridge muddle when they had set the Pinkerton man on her trail; but that they were now groping in the dark.

What had happened in the mean time to shake their confidence in their own conclusions?

Had Mrs. Marbridge furnished them with a new piece of evidence which had upset their hypothesis? It certainly seemed so.

"I'm going to get down to cases at once, Miss Wharton," continued the prosecutor. "Last Tuesday night, while motoring, you had a run of hard luck, hadn't you? First, you had trouble with the engine of your roadster; then you got lost?"

Julia nodded, fear clutching at her heart.

"Between eleven and twelve, nearer twelve, I think," Young went on, "your father telephoned the sheriff here that you had not returned from the Roses. Mr. Walters investigated and found that, after leaving their house, you had had your car hauled into a Monroe Pike garage for repairs; and that after quitting the garage you had started out in the direction of

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The butler hesitated.

"Go on."

"He said it—it was odd you didn't keep so important an engagement!"

Julia colored angrily. She could almost hear Philip Paget's purring accents faintly stressing the word. The man had gall unlimited.

"What else, John?"

"That's all, Miss Julia. At first he seemed to think I was lying to him; that you were in, but refused to see him. At that I told him you wouldn't see him even if you were in. That those were your orders."

"And then?"

"He went away. But, begging your pardon, Miss Julia, I think he's a dangerous crank. Shall I tell Kripps to keep him out?"

"Never mind, John," replied Julia, much more lightly than she felt. "I guess he won't bother us again."

The butler bowed and departed.

Julia could see that she had aroused his curiosity. He was doubtless wondering why she did not order that "dark, foreign-looking gentleman" kept off the premises. He was too good a servant, of course, to dispute her orders, and too faithful to question her wisdom.

Yet Julia could read him like an open book; and she was well aware that he was puzzled by her attitude toward Philip Paget.

She found her mother in the library reading a novel by Arnold Bennett. Ethel Wharton turned around in her chair as her daughter came up behind her.

"Did madame finish, Julia?" she asked languidly.

"Yes, mother."

"Have you had your lunch?"

"In town. I'm going out for a run."

"So soon? You're scarcely back."

"It's a wonderful afternoon, mother. I'll take the roadster if it's been returned."

"All right, Julia." Mrs. Wharton resumed her reading; then interrupted it once more to add, as her daughter was leaving the room: "Some one rang you up about half an hour ago."

"Tom?"

"No—but it was a man's voice. He said he'd call again."

As Julia hurried around to the garage, she wondered if it might have been Paget who had tried to reach her on the phone. But she ruminated that she had little time for conjectures now; she would have to get to Tilton as speedily as possible.

She fervently hoped that the roadster would be in its place. The owner of the establishment to which her father had ordered it taken for repairs had said he would return it by Friday morning. But she was disappointed on arriving at the garage to find that he had not kept his word.

Charles was inflating a tire of her father's limousine.

"The roadster hasn't been returned yet," he explained apologetically, as though it were altogether his own fault.

"Oh, I'm so disappointed," Julia exclaimed. It was the fastest machine in the place.

"Where d' you want to go, Miss Julia? Can't I take you?"

"Oh, no!"

If she visited Tilton, she wanted to go there alone.

She glanced around for the runabout, which generally stood on the other side of the limousine. It was the only other car which the Whartons possessed which she would trust herself to drive. As for the limousine, her father usually wanted that a little later in the afternoon. And the runabout was not in the garage.

Charles grinned ruefully.

"The runabout, Miss Julia? The superintendent has it. Where d' you want to go?" he repeated. "Can't I take you?"

Julia pondered.

It was almost too late now to go to Tilton except by car. What was the harm, anyway, in letting Charles drive her over? He would not be likely to find out what the nature of her errand was. He might even think that she had been summoned to the county seat to pay a fine for speeding.

Charles stood respectfully awaiting her decision. At length she replied:

"After all, you might take me where I want to go. It's on a little personal business. Do you imagine you could carry me

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ton Detective Agency," he returned. "They will tell you I am all I represent myself to be. My name's Nagle."

Julia started. The man before her was the detective whom the county authorities had secured to work on the Marbridge case. He was the sleuth who had ascertained the innocence of Stimson and his woman pal.

"Very well, Mr. Nagle," she said. "Tell Mr. Walters I shall be at Tilton late this afternoon."

Nagle touched his hat.

"You've reached a wise decision, Miss Wharton," he commented. "I shall remain here until you take a train."

As Julia crossed the bridge over the tracks to the down-town side, she fancied Nagle's eyes were upon her back.

All the way to the Dolphin she kept turning over in her mind the morning's events: Spears's reception of her, and its dramatic conclusion; her almost ludicrous pursuit by Nagle, and its amazing climax.

What did they portend for her? Were the police cognizant that she had been with Marbridge on the fatal night? Had Marbridge fully recovered his memory, and so informed them? Or had they merely suspected it?

Had they discovered that she was being hounded by Spears and his satellites, and were they going to offer her their protection against the blackmailers? But in that event they would not have sought her out in the privacy of her own home, instead of setting a Pinkerton man on her trail.

To all appearances, they seemed to connect her, in some fashion, with the shooting of Marbridge. But, if so, why had they not arrested her? Had it been due to a lack of sufficient evidence?

And now, were the police going to corner her in an office and administer what Tom Lansdowne had called the third degree, to force her to tell them all that they imagined she knew?

Perhaps it had been her father's wealth and position which had saved, and would in future save her, from brutal treatment at their hands. The longer Julia thought about it, the more firmly she became convinced that this hypothesis accounted for their delay in approaching her.

How much or how little they actually knew about her brief, but unfortunate, association with Marbridge, Julia, of course, had not the faintest idea; or where they had learned it. But she reflected that she must keep them in absolute ignorance of the machinations of William Vaughan Spears and his gang. If Walters and Young discovered that she was being hounded by blackmailers, they might derive from that fact the last link in the chain of evidence pointing to her as the woman they sought.

As to what Nagle had deduced from shadowing her, she was unable to hazard a single guess; she hoped he had deduced nothing damaging to herself. She would have given a good deal to find out what his thoughts were when he discovered that the woman in black was in reality the daughter of Barclay Wharton.

At all costs, she must keep from Philip Paget, she told herself grimly, the knowledge that the police had summoned her to Tilton. He would glory in that information.

It would make him a good deal bolder. He would then be certain that his surmises about her movements on Tuesday night had a basis in fact, and, believing that the county authorities would be inclined to deal diplomatically with a well-known heiress, he would make his importunities for money more odious than ever.

By the time she had reached the Dolphin, she had abandoned trying to solve the dilemma. Following a hasty lunch, she caught an early train to a station near Pinecrest, in her arms a bundle containing the black dress, veil and hat—she might need them again—and, safely tucked away in a pocket of her skirt, the article which the *Gadfly* had threatened to publish.

The butler intercepted her in the hallway of the Wharton mansion.

"Miss Julia," he said, "the gentleman you spoke to me about called again this morning."

Julia wheeled nervously.

"At what time, John?"

"About ten o'clock."

"What did he have to say?"

"He said, Miss Julia—"

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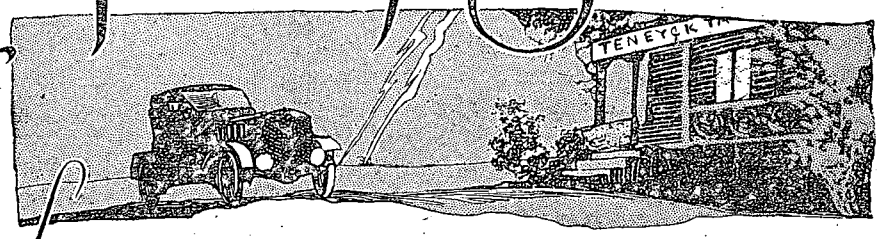
In Fear of Scandal



by Reese James and Laura King

Authors of "In the Blue Limousine."

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

JULIA WHARTON, daughter of the wealthy Barclay Wharton, resident of Pinecrest, in North Jersey, loses her way in her roadster, and around midnight stops in a rainstorm at a strange roadhouse, the Ten Eyck Tavern. Here she encounters Reginald Marbridge, whom she has met once at a reception, and he induces her to have some coffee with him while waiting for the storm to let up. Then he directs her on her way and after fancying that she had been pursued by another motorcar she reaches home safely. Next day she is horrified to read in the papers that Marbridge has been shot, is lying unconscious at St. Paul's Hospital in New York, and that detectives are seeking the strange young woman with whom he was seen supping at the Ten Eyck just before the shooting. More, Tom Lansdowne, her best man friend, has been retained by Mrs. Marbridge in her suit for divorce, and meantime one Philip Paget visits Julia and sends her a thinly disguised account of her experience at the Ten Eyck, a proof of an article to appear in the *Social Gadfly*. Realizing this is blackmail, Julia puts on mourning and calls on the editor, who attempts to lift her veil. Fleeing, she senses she is followed by a man who finally tells her that Sheriff Walters and County Prosecutor Young, of Tilton, New Jersey, want to have a talk with her as soon as possible.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOHN GROWS APPREHENSIVE.

JULIA gazed at the man affrightedly.

"What do they want to see me about?" she stammered.

He sidled closer.

"I'd rather not tell you here," he responded in an undertone, glancing significantly at the elevator-man, who was regarding them askance as they descended. "And I don't want you to be seen much in my company, Miss Wharton. If you'll promise me to turn up at Sheriff Walters's office, in Tilton, some time this afternoon, I won't trouble you any longer."

"But—but—" Julia began to protest as the elevator billowed to a standstill at the bottom.

The lift-man pulled open the door with a clang, and Julia and the stranger stepped out once more into the subway.

"I strongly advise you to come," he said. "It will be to your best interests, Miss Wharton."

Was there a covert menace in the man's words?

Of a sudden Julia feared, with a sinking heart, that he might be another member of the *Gadfly* gang, who, by impersonating a detective, was attempting to surprise her into a damaging admission of some sort.

"How do I know you are what you pretend to be?" she demanded of the man. "Can you prove you are in Sheriff Walters's employ?"

He drew back his coat and displayed a nickel-plated badge, which gleamed dully in the lights of the subway.

"If you doubt my word, call up Pinker-

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ravine that was profoundly dark. The ravine led straight to the river Mendel. Through the trees beyond the trooper could catch the occasional gleam of moonlit water. Holland lay down yonder, hidden by mist-clad woods. By following the river it was hardly a half-hour's walk to neutral Sluis.

But the deadly barrier lay between!

The uhlan knew perfectly well where he was. He was nearing the wire entanglements whereby with diabolical ingenuity his military leaders had solved the problem of holding a maximum of frontier with a minimum of men. For one hundred and fifty miles the Belgian border was fenced so effectively that from Maastricht to the North Sea the labyrinth was studded with the carcasses of wild and domestic animals.

The soldier clambered to the lip of the ravine and for a long moment peered into the uncertain blackness below, then shaking his head, he turned abruptly to the right, determined to follow the barrier until either he came upon the woman or reached a sentry-box where he could report.

And as he strode through the forest, a pensive warning hummed in his ears. He had heard it many times before.

Just then the thought: "Are my wits wandering?" suddenly received confirmation; for directly he perceived a ghostly countenance, an uncanny face with burning eyeballs that glared up at him from the undergrowth. He rubbed his eyes. He felt sure that it was purely imaginary—this spectral gleam from the shade, yet on the instant the sight of it chilled the uhlan.

"*Wer da? Wer da?*" he gasped.

There was no response. The glimmer vanished. He shrugged irritably.

"*Himmel!*" he growled. "My nerve is broken!"

Of course, he assured himself, it was but a fantasy born of his extreme exhaustion. He had only to approach, reach forward and the thing would dissolve in thin air.

The soldier stepped forward, bent his trembling knees—

"*Ach!*" he snarled, leaping back.

The fantom did not dissolve on his approach but very distinctly wriggled along the ground and vanished at his touch. He heard the whimper of a child not far away.

Again he sprang forward in the darkness.

"By all the fiends of perdition!" he hissed. "I'll throttle you where you crawl, you wooden-legged Dutch sniper!"

But the soldier only clawed at the empty air. As he spoke he tripped over the cripple's crutches and fell heavily—fell fairly upon the singing wires—the diabolically hidden living wires that vibrated melodiously with a spark emitting voltage sufficient to electrocute a regiment.

The uhlan flung his three-fingered fist above his head. With an awful suddenness the hawklike eyes glazed and set in a petrified glare, while a scream of anguish swiftly dwindled into a despairing gurgle and died in his throat.

And Limping Hans, awe-stricken by that frozen countenance, shivered with pity.

"*Ach,* poor man!" he groaned. "I was not his executioner. It was Providence who mixed Three Fingers' mit my crutches when I tried to crawl away."

Shuddering, he turned and disappeared in the dark ravine.

"Onkle Hans! I here—here!" Suddenly it came out of the shadows ahead. It was a child's voice that piped, weary and very sleepy. The outlaw came to himself.

"Du liddle darlin'!" he murmured, and turned in the direction of the voice.

A woman was sitting there on the trunk of a tree. As he drew near she bared her teeth and for an instant stared into his pallid face. Then she sprang forward.

"Give me the joy of seeing the *Boche* dead at my feet!" she hissed.

"*Nein—nein,* Marie! Your account was closed. Der wrath of der goot *Gott* will always overtake der wicked. Nefer forgit dat," he whispered solemnly. "Come. Now we're safe beyond der deadfall we stay until der war was done. Don'd you hear me? Now come to your man in Sluis, where you can be yust so happy what you like."

The obsession of infinite bitterness that encompassed Marie Vermel fell away like a black cloud before the sun. She covered her face with her hands and choked back the sobs that shook her. Then the three derelicts turned and fled—fled like frightened wildlings, out of war's hideous night into the sunlight of freedom's dawn.

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crossed the room to her dreaming child. She dropped on her knees beside the wooden box. Once more the dimpled face blossomed in the smiles of blissful innocence. It was the father's face, the father's smile.

In her simple code the honor of an absent father should be upheld by the mother, even unto death. Not to him alone was it her sacred obligation, but to this unfolding flower of their love she owed a debt that only a mother's undying fealty could fully satisfy. Naught could cancel that debt but the utter extinction of this barbarian, who knew no law save the might of frightfulness over right. Joyfully she could have killed the savage while he slept. One thrust of his saber was enough. Why hesitate?

Thus she pondered long while the candle burned low and the fitful embers whitened and grew cold. At last she tiptoed to the chimney-corner and drew the uhlan's saber from its scabbard. It was razor-edged. Without a sound she crept to the side of the sleeping trooper. She paused; she smiled; but her smile was ghastly and terrible to see. She poised the steel above the sleeper. Her fingers clasped the weapon convulsively. "Last night you held the mastery! This night it is I—"

At that instant came a break in her absorption. It was a rude awakening. Even in the act of striking, an iron hand clutched her wrist, and in her ear the voice of Limping Hans whispered:

"Wait, woman, wait! Leave Three Fingers to me. You was not his executioner. Come!"

Instinctively, before she had time for thought, she yielded to him; yielded calmly, very calmly. She looked at the soldier, profoundly slumberous; she looked at her sleeping child; she looked at Limping Hans, still grasping the soldier's blade and eying her dubiously; she glimpsed all without a word, without a tear. Only the lines of her face were tense and upon her ashen features the outlaw read a nameless something which told him that she was ready for the journey, no matter what might threaten.

"Goot!" he whispered. "Now, den, give me liddle Victor."

But already the mother had slung the unawakened child across her own stout shoulders, just as the Indian mother carries her little one.

"No!" she whispered.

"Oh, well; den keep close mit me," he commanded softly, leading the way. "Der coast was clear yust now. Dem sentry fellers was so sleepy dey snored on their feet when I came by."

So, when a little before midnight the three-fingered trooper sat up bewildered, and stared around, he did not find the wife of Victor Vermel awaiting him. He was dumb with amazement as the meaning of it dawned slowly. He staggered to his feet and groped his way to the chimney-corner. His weapons were gone. Abruptly the drowsy one got a grip of his wits.

"Ah-ha! Curse the harpy!" he roared. "*Donnerwetter!* A nice mess this!" He paused and tightly clasped his throbbing temples. "She can't be far away," he thought. "*Wunder-bar!* I must be off!"

Whereupon he got into his jacket and boots, picked his uncertain steps to the sheep-shed, which stood out dimly in the moonlight, mounted his horse and, still muttering curses, plunged into the forest.

The soldier's head buzzed like a beehive. His exhausted brain seemed hopeless. He scarcely remembered his orders. What were they? He had to report for patrol duty at midnight. The two hours' truancy he had allowed himself were over, and more, but the fact did not occur to him.

Time stopped when one slept. Yes. First he had got to recover his weapons and then report to the captain of the guard, who would be none the wiser of his indiscretion.

Again and again he halted his horse and listened. The crackle of rotten undergrowth, the sound of a stealthy footfall, the feeble appeal of a woman's voice—that longed-for music. But all the trooper could hear was the restless soughing of the wind through the tree-tops—all save the monotonous thud of his horse's hoofs.

"*Himmel!* I might go on this way clear into Holland and every border-runner on the way would hear me coming. *Gott!* What folly."

The uhlan slid out of the saddle and stumbled ahead on foot. At length he struck a bit of a path which sloped into a

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"Gracious!" soliloquized the outlaw, lowering his weapon. "Nefer once could I see dat *Boche's* face. I'll stick close by. Maybe Marie needs der cripple," and he hobbled into the seclusion of a near-by clump of trees.

At once the newcomer lighted the candle and held it over the rude couch where Marie Vermel lay beside her child, apparently in deep slumber. For a moment he stood and ruminated, studying the motionless woman as an owl might eye a mouse.

"*Himmel!*" he grumbled. "A hungry stomach knows no conscience, ha; then, too, women adore the masterful man. Yoo-hoo, Marie. Wake up!" and he shook her.

The woman sat up. The flare of the candle flickered in her slumberous eyes. She rubbed them dreamily.

"Ah-ha! Asleep, and fully dressed!" exclaimed the trooper. "Come, *madame,* some food and drink then I, too, will sleep, for I am dead tired."

He pulled off his jacket and boots and irritably threw them on a rickety bunk that stood along another side of the room.

Without a word the woman arose, renewed the smoldering embers with fresh fuel and hung the pot in the flame.

The soldier drew up a stool and leaned heavily against the table.

"Well, *mon ami,*" he drawled drowsily, "what have you been doing to-day?" Then, seeing the remnants of a feast, he added lightly: "Entertaining good company?"

With true feminine discrimination she said simply:

"Pardon, *monsieur.* The lunch? It is nothing. One of your comrades has honored me with his company."

The uhlan beamed upon her while he greedily devoured the remainder of the mutton, mumbling meanwhile:

"Our friend shall share his food and shelter with me. But this roast, *madame,* is cold. In the name of hospitality bring me something hot."

She brought him a generous bowl of steaming broth.

"At your service, *monsieur,*" she said with a cheerful curtsy, serving a fresh loaf of bread for the broth. "How fares it, soldier? All over for the day?"

"*Himmel*—no; curse the luck! On guard duty again at midnight after riding all day with despatches."

"What, *monsieur,* must you do others' duty?"

"Doubled patrol this night. Limping Hans, the border runner, is in the neighborhood. To-night he must be brought in—living or dead."

Marie Vermel smiled, but her smile was not pleasant to see.

"Ah-ha! You must take exceedingly good care of yourself, *monsieur.*"

"And you, little one. Aren't you afraid all alone here at night?"

"Not a bit," she replied, still smiling. "Why should I be afraid?"

"That's right; why, indeed?" he agreed, swelling visibly. "Why should you be afraid with me to look after your safety? And now, my angel, be good enough to pour for me the rest of that rare wine, after which I will snatch a couple of hours' sleep. I need it. No sleep last night, you know."

He drank the wine lingeringly, lovingly.

"*Gott!*" he grunted. "That warms me up like a sweetheart's hug. Ah, little one, no grand lady could receive her lover in nicer fashion. Yes, I shall take very good care of you, Mme. Vermel."

He peered amorously into his companion's comely face, his eyes of a hawk glittering. Involuntarily she shrank from the touch of his hand.

"And, by the way," he babbled on, "my captain desires to be presented. I shall bring him—maybe to-morrow. You will be greatly honored. My captain is only happy when he is killing men or loving women. Heigho!" The soldier vented a last yawn. "I must get a little sleep. At eleven, *madame,* call me without fail." Whereat he deposited himself comfortably beside his coat and boots.

"Very good, *monsieur.* It shall be as you command." As the woman spoke she took the quilt from her own bed and tucked it snugly around him. Already he was snoring. "In two hours I will call you, of a certainty; never fear," she muttered. "Until then take your utmost rest, my brave defender."

Marie turned away from the sleeper and

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terposed with an emphasis that seemed to forbid a refusal, "once for all I tell you aboud it. Many times haf I crossed over mit runaway prisoners; for much money, too. I was not afraid of dem *Boche* traps. Listen close, den I go.

"Der river Mendel was not more as half a mile away. It flows straight into Holland. I knew der ground, every inch, for miles around. At midnight der patrol was changed. Dem old, sleepy Landsturmers was always late. Well, den, just before midnight I come mit your door und knock very soft. All was darkness—inside und out. So? Very goot. Liddle Victor sleeps all der time und I pack him mit my back till he vake up in Holland. Maybe on hands and knees we go; oh, ya; you said it."

On her little chair at the cripple's very elbow Marie Vermel hung breathless on the low-spoken words, her brilliant eyes dilating fitfully between solicitude, perplexity, vague uncertainty; but with every glimmer of doubt succeeded by the wistful tenderness of genuine affection for the blunt-speaking, young-old cripple—that melting compassion which good women ever feel for those who suffer.

The woman's head dropped and she faltered:

"I—I don't know; God alone knows what awaits. Starvation, oppression, insult—perhaps death—here; or freedom, home and happiness there." With that the apathetic endurance that so long had sustained her gave way to blinding tears. "Oh, oh, my darling, my child!" she sobbed. "Oh, little son of Victor Vermel! What—what is to become of us?"

"Hush, dere now, now," awkwardly comforted the cripple. "Oh, well! Now don'd you cry; don'd cry, Marie. You hear what I said. Gracious! Dem tears upsetted Onkel Hans. Sh! You vake der baby. Listen, woman! If you don'd cry to-night I bring you und liddle Victor safe mit your man in Sluis."

"No, no, good friend! Not this night!" She looked around fearfully. What did the woman expect to hear or see?

"Come along, Marie; ya, this very night. Why you so scared?" He paused. His lean face darkened as he growled angrily: "What! You won't come mit me to your lawful husband?"

"Our Lady of Sorrows!" she murmured. Involuntarily she stiffened in her chair. Her face blanched.

"Hark!" she cautioned faintly. "Did you not hear it? There—again! Good friend, go!"

The pad-pad of horse-hoofs on soggy leaves sounded more and more distinctly. The outlaw held up his hand.

"Sh!" he whispered. "Quick! Der crutches."

She silently obeyed. He slung the gun over his shoulder and hobbled to the sleeping child. Stooping, he softly kissed the upturned cheek.

"Now der light I put oud," he murmured; then to the trembling woman at the door he whispered: "Remember, Marie, yust before midnight I come."

"My faith! You come to your death!"

"Well, yust der same I come. Maybe you change your mind. It costs you nodding to come mit me. Victor Vermel was a Belgian soldier; he was my comrade; he was my liddle Victor's fader—don'd forgit dat. *Ach!*" he muttered, "I got to bring Marie mit her man!" Still soliloquizing, Limping Hans stumped out of the hut.

These reflections had barely flitted through the outlaw's brain when he glimpsed an object moving under the trees. A horseman was coming straight toward him out of the forest. Lurking in the shadow of the hut Limping Hans was sufficiently near to distinguish his spiked helmet, but he could not make out the rider's features.

"*Ach!* Der uhlan comes mit some mischief," muttered the sniper, taking careful aim, "but I wait till his fingers I can count. If dats Three Fingers — *Gott!*" He smothered a fierce imprecation.

On they came, horse and rider, with drooping heads, as if ending a long and wearisome journey. They crossed the clearing and, the unguided horse unerringly finding Marie Vermel's door, halted. The soldier threw down his bridle-rein, stolidly dropped to the ground and without knocking entered.

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not bombard the roof from over one's head, and yet, sometimes at night I feel—well, my friend, you heard the boy!"

"Ya, I know. Dat was Three Fingers who comes in midoud knocking—the same sojer feller what spoiled my leg. *Ach!* I nefer forgit Three Fingers so long what I live!"

"Hark!" The woman suddenly straightened in her chair. "Sh!" she whispered, "I thought I heard a footfall."

She arose and went to the window. The wind was getting up, blowing cumulous clouds of mist into shreds and scattering the thin wisps over the dark horizon, while almost in the zenith a pale moon cast its fitful radiance upon the lonely hut. After a moment the woman resumed her seat. Evidently her ears had deceived her.

The outlaw turned to her. A gleam of suspicion lighted his keen eyes. He gazed intently upon her anxious face as if he would have read there some sign of an attempt to practise upon his credulity. At length he bluntly said:

"I have seen your husband, Victor Vermel. He was at Sluis, yust over der border, mit dem oder interned Belgians in Holland—my lofely Holland!"

The woman nodded incredulously and widened her round eyes. She clasped and unclasped her hands across her breast convulsively. Save for three brief letters, not since the first week of the war had she received authentic tidings of her husband.

Limping Hans did not wait for an answer, but went on a little hastily, as if afraid of some awkward questioning:

"Ya, oder goot men were dere—all mit experience of der bullets, too; be sure of dat. But of dem Belgians none return to dis side until ends der war; nor can dey write; but, *Gott* be praised! dem Dutchmen was goot neighbors all. More like guests as prisoners our men was treated."

"You say you met him?"

"*Nein.* I saw him, but he was far away mit der barracks compound. If in dat compound I get, I, too, stay till ends der war."

"And my Victor wasn't killed at Liege or Louvain or along der Yser, where so many of our people take their long rest? *Gott!* You are quite sure it was my Victor?"

"Ya. Dere was but one Victor Vermel in der whole world. How he could be killed so many times—at Liege, Louvain, along the Yser?"

"And he sent me no message, neither can he come. Ah-h! One might as well be widowed." She drew a long breath and half-closed her eyes. "No," she declared. "Never will my husband come back to Belgium; never will there be another Belgium. Ah, my friend, sometimes before I go to sleep at night I pray that my little one and I may die in peace rather than live longer in misery; then, when I awaken, I fall on my knees and ask that soon—soon it all may end and once more my soldier-husband may come to me."

Limping Hans passed a brawny hand across his forehead as if he would banish the dark frown that still lowered upon his brow. His eyes pierced her through and through. He seemed to be asking himself if he could trust her when he questioned:

"Marie, will you come mit me to your man in Holland?"

"And cross that dreadful dead line? Ah-h! Think of my child!"

"I know der safe way over. Poof! It was nodding mit Onkel Hans!"

"Many have been killed by those heartless deadfalls, no one knows how many; slaughtered after a few seconds of awful torture that must seem an eternity—ach! spitted and cooked like partridges in snares that are never to be found twice in the same place, so cunningly are they hidden—"

"Ya. Poor Schneider!"

"It would be madness to risk it, and yet— My friend, I would go on hands and knees from here to Sluis to be again with my Victor."

"So? Maybe we haf to go mit hands und knees."

"For eight years we lived together—my man and I. Together we toiled; together we prospered; together we fought when the invaders came. Nothing troubled us until then. We troubled nobody. Since—ah—since! Starvation for my little one and for me—" She paused and wiped her cheek.

"Now, den, Marie," Limping Hans in-

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"Dere now; dat's one goot t'ing, eh? *Nein—nein;* we ain'd afraid. Dat's right, hug Onkel Hans up tight den he tole you aboud old dog Schneider. My, my, dat's der funniest t'ing! Where's Schneider, eh? So, he runs away? Well, he don'd nefer come back. Eh? You like Schneider? Dere, dere; wipe your eye oud. Ya, you forgit dat dog. I tole you dat all der time —forgit him! Maybe he bide you if he come back. *Nein?* Well, yust now as we was coming along togeder—me and Schneider—we, that is, I— Oh, well, dem sojer fellers dey coax Schneider mit a big piece of frankfurter. My, my; but it was goot! Und hungry Schneider he go right away after more. Ha, ha, ha! Und he forgits Hans und moder und liddle Victor. Right away Schneider forgits everyt'ing. *Nein.* Schneider don'd come no more. Poor Schneider!"

The fire blazed merrily. Soon the little head began to nod. The mother, listening attentively without speaking, all the while had been busily preparing the evening meal. From time to time she fixed her eyes on the pair in the chimney-corner and over her full, round face the soft bloom deepened—the pretty bloom of youth and health, the ruddy, full-blooded flush of the virile Flemish stock.

"Come, angel," said she, laying her hand on the cripple's shoulder. "Draw up to the table. Your evening meal is ready."

"Sh!" Hans gently lifted the sleeping child and hobbled to the homely bed. "Dere, dere now," he crooned. "In der dreamland you can be yust so happy what you like, du liddle darlin'."

Already the little one was deep in the profound sleep. Existence, whether in the quiet home of the prosperous village artizan or amid the squalor of this poverty-ridden spot, was all the same to him. Life was a huge jest. He was smiling at it in his sleep, his lips dimpling fitfully as the outlaw gazed upon him. Limping Hans had always held that the dreaming child was smiling at his baby friends on the other side whom he had left so recently and who now and then paid him a visit in the halcyon hours of slumber against that wonderful time when they, too, would be born into this world.

"Angel! The soup will be stone cold," warned the mother. "Come, and while you eat, tell me how fares it with you."

Limping Hans, the proscribed hybrid who was neither Hollander, Belgian or German, sat down to the heartening meal and beamed and beamed through the steam curling up from the hot soup at the delicious, all-comforting perfume of mutton roast just out of the oven, with its garnish of strong leek and parsley and savory onions—a gamy redolence that intoxicated him. Then there were new-laid eggs and a slice of cold pork and a loaf of fresh black bread such as only the Flemish housewives know how to bake; and, to crown all, a cobwebbed bottle of tart, fruity wine, thick with age, the hoarded treasure of happier days.

For a moment Marie Vermel watched her famished guest with great satisfaction. She hovered over him solicitously; waited on him; tucked a soft cushion of feathers under his crippled leg and placed his crutches handily beside his gun in the chimney-corner.

Then she turned to the fireplace where her own portion of soup simmered odorously in the kettle. For a time they ate in silence, for the outlaw was too hungry to talk. But, still eating, at last he began:

"Blessed, ya, thrice blessed be der hand of woman," he chanted in a full-throated voice, puffing out his chest comfortably. "A hand dat can put der halo even aboud der sheep's shoulder; ya, und aboud der brace of widgeon, too, der cripple winged.

"Oh, yes, Marie," he went on jovially, with a quaint mingling of familiarity and respect, "you don'd give me such wine like dat every time I call. Dat was der first I taste in many long days. Maybe der reason was you couldn't got it, eh? Ah, Marie, der goot wine brightens my life yust like when husband und wife agree so well togeder. Try anoder, eh?" And as both drank he chuckled: "Well, may you smack der lips und go ah—a! Come on again. *Nein?* Ha! You safe dat boddle for dem gossipy Germans, eh?"

"I do not. You know well how I detest the Pickelhaubers. Neither do I fear them. At the least, here in this solitude, they do

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of dead foliage completely covered him, and he stood hip deep in a tangle of discolored undergrowth, again listening attentively.

As with the wily intuition of the driven fox, he strained his ears, furtively parting the swaying branches and peering into the misty void, there came a faint call of distress—a thin voice out of the sinister gray depths; a suppressed, anguished cry that seemed to carry less volume than the stifled groan of a nightmare-haunted sleeper; a pitifully scant whine that swiftly swelled into an agonized howl, then—abrupt silence.

"*Ach—Gott!* Anoder of dem accursed traps!" he muttered.

The cripple crept still deeper into the woodland in the direction of the stricken one, pausing at frequent intervals, hardly daring to breathe, but ever persistently eying the ground before him.

Suddenly he stopped. A dog of the faithful Flemish working-breed looked up from his very feet, but the look came from fast-glazing eyes. The animal was twisted into a grotesque heap and every quivering limb snapped and cracked like a tautening whip-lash.

"My, my!" gasped Limping Hans in a hoarse, terrible whisper. He unslung his fowling piece and threw back the trigger to end at once his brother's agony, but recognizing the quick death he turned away, muttering and shaking his fist impotently at the invisible, overwhelming terror.

Now the rotting brake crumbled under the outlaw's foot; the trees creaked and clashed overhead and shed the tear-drops that gathered on their leaves. As he limped through the drenched and broken fern his gun and the dead game pounded wearyingly on his back, and he instinctively quickened his pace.

Soon a few tree-clumps standing alone outlined their ghostly shapes in the fog and the low walls of a thatch-roofed stone hut came into view. It stood in the center of a little clearing, flanked by a sheep-shed, a pig-pen and a few piles of rotting fertilizer, making as brave a fight for existence as possible amid the vast desolation.

Limping Hans shuffled up the steps, pulled the latch-string and entered.

In the only room a young and buxom Flemish woman hustled busily about. At her heels trotted a ruddy-cheeked child of five. A few shreds of rags and tatters that still held together clung tenderly to the plump little body. Under a thatch of curling black hair, full of crimson leaves of autumn, blinked a pair of eyes that were filled with dazed amazement. The flickering candle-light caressed his round face with a faint halo. An instant the child searched the simidarkness, then with outstretched arms ran to the newcomer with a glad cry:

"Oh, it's Onkel Hans!"

The outlaw bent, seized up the little body and tossing him high, cried out:

"Why, hello, du liddle Victor! Say, how you was? Pooty goot, eh? My, my, how scared we was. Ha, ha, ha! And who it should be but your Onkel Hans! Maybe it's bedder I go oud, eh?"

"I thought it was the bad soldier-man who comes in the night and peeps in the window and opens the door without knocking and frightens my mama, and make her feed him and tries to caress her and coax her—my mama; and—and—" his plaint faltered, inaudible and mute from eloquently quivering lips.

"*Ach,* boy!" Hans interposed explosively. "Dey come no more pooty quick."

"But I wasn't afraid—me? I am a soldier!"

"Ya; so was your fader, so was Onkel Hans, eh? Don'd you nefer forgit your fader, my liddle Victor."

Hans unclasped the clinging fingers from his neck, put the child down and threw the dead ducks on the table. When he had taken the chair the mother had drawn close to the fireside, he shook an admonitory finger. The urchin climbed into his lap.

"My, my, what a brafe boy!" said Hans, patting the tousled head. "He nefer once loses dat smile. Say, sojer, where you get dat dimple mit your chin—yust like your fader's dimple, eh? Dem white teeth und sparkling eyes, eh—your moder's lofely black eyes? Gracious! Dem big, strong arms! My, my der *Boches* run away so fast when dey see moder's brafe liddle sojer-man—so fast, dey spills demselves mit their feet! All dem big *Boches* down mit der mud togeder.

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Derelicts of No Man's Land

by Everett S. Chapman

THE outlaw shrank back on his crutches, peered into the twilight for a breathless second, then dropped noiselessly into the bloom and blighted bracken all sagging with wet.

Suddenly shadowy figures loomed through the whirling mist and two soldiers, their spiked helmets dripping rain, passed so close the cripple could have tripped either with his crutch. They were conversing in low gutturals the lurker knew little of, but in that little he caught the sound of his own name. He stifled an oath and his fingers clutched his gun-barrel as though it were a human throat.

"Ya, MM. Boche," he muttered, "it was well you travel mit pairs!"

Could he have translated the soldiers' smothered German—that perplexing jargon which always irritated him with its taunting uncertainty—he would have understood something like this:

"Yes, Limping Hans, the Dutch sniper. It must have been his fowling piece we heard. 'Wooden Legs' doesn't run so fast since 'Three Fingers' winged him. *Grosses Himmel!* That cripple carries more news across the border than Herr Commandante's wireless."

With that they vanished in a cloud of mist, still grumbling gruffly.

He with the charmed life put down the butt of his fowling piece and meditatively rested his chin on the hand that grasped the muzzle. His lean face, young and weather-painted in the colors of rugged health, glistened with mist, and water dripped from cap and coat and ran down the rude crutches where he leaned on them and braced forward against the wind, alert, intent upon catching the deadly humming song that always filled him with unavailing rage. But no sound returned save the ceaseless thrumming of the sea wind blowing in from the outer moors.

Abruptly a brace of wild ducks came speeding through the mist. The poacher breasted the wind, balancing handily on both crutches and one stout leg, and shoved his gun upward, then hesitated. At the same instant the haze around throbbed with the noisy whirr of rising wild fowl. With head bowed against the rain a third soldier followed in his comrades' footsteps.

And after them stealthily hobbled the poacher, a brace of dead ducks and his slung fowling piece bobbing comically on his back, his cruelly maimed leg swinging uselessly, his ugly crutches groping and exploring the treacherous bog as he went.

He could not go fast, he could not go very far in the uncertain, peopled void before him, but with amazing adroitness artfully he worked his way to the edge of the larger timber until a wilderness of dank, crossed limbs from which hung great gouts

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it was just then the only comfort he had on earth.

Then steps were heard approaching from the right of way. A hand pulled at the gunny-sack which protected the fire from the wind; and a sharp voice of authority said:

"You boes—get a move on you. Get out of here, and make time!"

The voice had a familiar sound, but Meighton did not just then attempt to place it. He could not see the man's face; the hand which shook the gunny-sack was fat and short-fingered, with a ring. The little red lights played in Meighton's eyes, and he began to drink his coffee.

"This ain't railroad land," one of the vags sneered at the conductor. And the other cut in with an oath.

The gunny-sack was jerked down and the conductor kicked the large can of coffee into the fire.

"Get out of here, I tell you!" He showed something under his coat, which looked like a star.

At sight of the bit of metal, the vags scrambled to their feet. Meighton sat still, drinking his coffee.

He knew the man, now; he had once been a conductor on the Missouri section of this road. His wife was a Sturtevant. Some day he would write to Blackwater or return there and tell every one that Mindel Meighton had taken to the roads.

In his unshaven, gaunt condition, the conductor had not instantly recognized Meighton.

"Get a move on you, bo," he ordered—jeering.

The red flicker in Meighton's eyes became a flame. He rose, deliberately setting down his coffee. If the conductor had known him he would not have dared his next move; the killing streak of the Meightons was too well known by people from Blackwater. But he lifted something he carried and struck Mindel Meighton in the face.

Next instant, Meighton's hands were around his throat.

The other vags stood an instant in horror. They saw the conductor become limp and his head fall back. Who would believe they had no part in this crime? It would be first degree murder for all three. They heard a man who had come from the coach, after the conductor, leap a section of the ditch and run toward the place.

Before the witness could see them, they had run to the right of way, dodged under the train and disappeared.

Meighton had lost all consciousness of his actions. Allen Spencer had spoken wisely, long before—there were two fortunes for him. He felt, now, as if fate had him in a fast grip.

He shook the victim again and again.

If he knew he was killing him, he could not let go—his fingers were no longer in his own control.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

IT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

SHE handed me a sugared cake,
And, smiling at me shyly,
"D'you know that I have learned to bake
And cook?" she whispered slyly.

There was a toothsomeness about
That cake—I was eleven;
I praised it both within and out,
For she was only seven.

To-day she chiseled off a slice
Of cake—I did not eat it
Or say it came from paradise;
We're married—so I beat it!

Horace Seymour Keller.

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looking over his shoulder? Or the blurring of the eyes which had come to him repeatedly that morning. He turned his head.

And there was no one there. Buck Sturtevant's wife was hundreds of miles away. And still she seemed to be looking over his shoulder, in triumph—

For he was not to have the revenge he had planned. She would never wish she had married Mindel Meighton. He had failed.

His hands no longer trembled. He folded the letter in green ink and put it away in his ragged pocket. There was really no reason for keeping it—the timber people were trying to sell and would consider no new propositions. But Meighton did not want to throw the letter which was a record of his failure into the waste-can, where some one might find it.

He held his head high as he went out of the station. For years he had lived with just one object, to get his revenge in his own way. The thirst for it had been growing steadily. Now, the hate he was never to satisfy semed burning him up—as an acid burns up the body.

He suffered so that he did not care what became of him now—only that nobody at Blackwater should learn of his failure.

As he crossed the station platform, he brushed by prosperous, busy people—he hated them all, he hated the world.

From Railroad Street, he turned toward the freight yards. When he came out from the shelter of buildings, a cutting wind swept down the tracks. He passed cheap eating-houses, which smelled of coffee and frying fat, and was hungry.

Well, he was down and out, now, for good.

"Down and out," he repeated, aloud, to himself, like an insane man. The car over which he had worked two years would be of no use except in the place for which it had been designed.

In his room at the lodging-house were some possessions he could sell for enough to pay his arrears of rent and to take him to some place where he could start fresh—mechanical drawing instruments, and tools. But he had no desire to start fresh. He would take to the roads, he thought; and the landlord could have the tools.

At a point below the freight yards, just outside the city smoke, a train with a private car had halted. Meighton caught glimpses of men smoking and talking inside the coach. He walked around it and came to a ditch.

The ditch was just outside railroad property—provokingly near for hoboes to camp, since they were of course waiting their chance to slip aboard some empty. Tramps had made a fire in the shelter of the ditch, and were making coffee.

"I have found my level, at last," thought Meighton as he approached the fire.

He remembered Alice—now married to a fortunate man; and the other girl who was once ready to love him. He might have had a home, now, and work. But Julia would not let him go. He knew, now, she would never let him have a home or anything else. She would hunt him to ruin—and when he was quite ruined, somehow she would find it out.

"H'r'ye, bo," called the tramps in the ditch.

"I look just what I am," Meighton thought.

They had draped a gunny-sack around a bush for a wind-break; and a heap of stones rose on the other side. Meighton crawled behind the wind-break—his teeth chattering—and gained the shelter of the ditch.

One of the tramps gave him coffee in a tin can.

"Lay low," he remarked. "I seen the conny around on this side."

"It's none of the conductor's business!" Fury entered Meighton's soul. "We're off the right-of-way."

The vags, he knew, cringed before the railroad men. Their particular dread was the railroad detective. To attack one of these "bulls" meant a long term in the penitentiary; and the killing of a bull by a tramp was almost the only offense for which hanging was the certain penalty.

Meighton had come to the level of the vag, now. Was he to cringe like a vag?

He lifted his can of coffee and blew on the top. The warmth comforted him;

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timber to the railroad. He would live in Blackwater and work through the whole range of hills. He had just seen the homes of these busy men of the Western town. They worked for love.

He would never have a home—he knew that, now. But he would work as well for hate. He saw a business man who had come down in his wife's electric brougham—saw the girlish wife wave her hand to him at his corner. He looked wistfully after the brougham till it disappeared in the crowd.

Then he turned toward Union Station. When he came within sight of the four-faced clock, his heart shied like a wild horse. For it was past the hour for him to hear; the night-letter was waiting for him in the telegraph office.

For the first time he felt afraid. They had almost promised to take his car. Besides, he assured himself, they could not be such fools as to reject the plan by which they could make a great business for themselves. Still, he experienced that faint nausea which comes at the crises of life, just before we know.

What would become of him now if he should fail? He had not thought of failure. As he entered Union Station to stand in the long line before the telegraph window, he remembered Allen Spencer.

"You'll either be a big man, Mindel, or end your life in prison for a killin'."

Meighton could not get away from the prophecy. He had told himself a thousand times it was a superstition, that Allen Spencer had known anything. Who, away from Black Knob, believed in Seventh Sons? Yet, this morning, he seemed to hang between two fates.

It was warm in Union Station—so that he soon felt faint and giddy. Through the broken soles of his boots, the tiles of the floor were cold against his feet. And the noises of the place seemed far away—chatter of people; babies crying; brush-mop of the negro janitor, knocking against the wall.

An odor of beef-steak and coffee came, when doors were opened, from the large dining-room—and from his place in the line, Meighton could see the white-clad tables and the waiters, soft-footed, white-shirted. The sight and smell of food made Meighton sick.

The man at the telegraph window seemed very slow—making sure, each time, he was giving the message to the right party. Meighton kept watching a girlish figure near the head of the line. The dark hair was threaded with red and gold. The girl—the woman—had no coat; and over her one-piece frock was a silk girdle, such as he had seen before. In her arms, its white cap against her shoulder, was a child.

He watched, until the mother turned. She was not—of course she was not Julia. He had watched a hundred women, since he came away from Blackwater, until they turned. None of them were beautiful when they turned. This woman had a short, homely face, with protruding teeth.

It was so hot in the room that the perspiration rolled from Meighton's face. But when a door was opened, the outside chill made him feel ill. His head ached, it had never ached in his life before; and there was something the matter with his eyes.

When at last he stood before the window he could not see the clerk's face clearly. Then the man gave him a pen, and he discovered he could not write his name—but made ineffectual jabs at the paper.

"Can't you write?" sneered the clerk.

The taunt seemed to steady Meighton's nerves. He signed his name in his bold, black hand, took his night letter and stepped out of the line.

Tearing the envelope with fingers that trembled, he walked to a window overlooking Railroad Avenue. A gush of black smoke went by, outside; beyond the smoke were eating-houses, and pawn-shops with their gilded balls.

The letter was typewritten in green ink. So long as Meighton lived, afterward, the sight of green typewriting would make him sicken.

He heard the click of the telegraph instrument—remorseless, erratic as the things that happen to a man. Now, as he spread his letter on the steam radiator, he almost thought he heard a light laugh behind him.

A shade fell over his paper—some one

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a melting mouth was in his mind, before his eyes—Julia. With Julia in his mind, how could he let another woman help him?

"Much obliged to you, sir," he said, looking up. "But I'll confess I have a feeling about risking money that belongs to—well, a girl. I think I've got a good proposition, but when a man takes a woman's money, he has to be mighty sure he isn't going to lose it."

Or—he must love the woman! Meighton did not say this. If he had loved this girl as once he had loved Julia, he could let her risk her money on his future. So he went away by himself, to win or lose.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VAGRANT.

THERE came a day when Meighton had worked out his plan and his car, and had offered it to that company of St. Louis men who owned forests on the slopes around Blackwater.

The night before he was to know what they would do, he did not try to sleep. Sitting up beside a window of the cheap lodging-house where he lived, he watched the stars go by above the town. It was in January and very cold in his room.

When at last the smoke of the city assumed a grayness and the stars looked sickly pale, he could bear inaction no longer—he went out of his lodging-house. When he looked back at that place, with its gaping windows, here and there patched with rags—occupied by Mexicans, Swedes and Japs—he realized how low he had got in the world.

He was without money. His corduroy trousers had turned from gray to a dirty yellow, faded by the sun, spotted with mud and rain. He wore a ragged flannel shirt and boots falling away from the soles. He had not been shaved for a week; and he was hungry. In his great excitement he did not know he was hungry; only that in two hours more he would receive a telegram from Missouri.

He strolled up Railroad Street. By a clock in front of a pawn-broker's, it was ten minutes past six. As soon as St. Louis business offices opened, they would wire him.

He crossed the railroad tracks, where he saw a tramp crawling from under a box-car.

"Well, I look like that," he thought. "I'm down and out, the scum of the earth."

But to-morrow he would be a man who had won. He walked on till the chimes of a cathedral somewhere tolled seven o'clock; then turned again toward Union Station. On his way he passed through a fine residence section. The morning was fine, though frosty; housemaids were out sweeping porches—they looked suspiciously at his old corduroys and flannel shirt, and watched him till he was out of the neighborhood—for he looked most miserable, shuddering as he was from hunger and cold, unwarmed by the sun.

Business men were starting for shops, factories, offices. To-morrow he would be one of them—but they didn't know it now. A clean-shaven, brisk man who was getting into his car remarked to the chauffeur:

"What is that bum doing, out this way? If you see him hanging around, when you come back, see about it."

Meighton heard the remark—the man did not care whether the bum heard or not. He looked at Meighton with his chin slightly elevated—as if to express his opinion of men who would not work.

"To-morrow," thought Meighton, "I shall have proved that my two years' work has counted."

But who would believe that to-day?

So he went past all these busy people. He walked with the shuffle of an ex-convict—it was only because his shoes were falling to pieces. But when he reached the down-town section, it caused men to follow him with that scornful, speculative look which reflected the thought in their minds:

"Where will this wild beast end? On the gallows?"

He would end, he knew, in a place like the one which belonged to the busiest of them.

He thought the St. Louis people would let him manage the work of transporting

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word, without touching her hands; then walked away to his own mount.

The girl was now flushed from excitement. She bent from the saddle and said—imperiously, but not quite steadily:

"Please come here, Mr. Meighton."

Mr. Meighton did so.

"Now, fix my stirrup."

She put her hand again on his shoulders, and her foot, in the handsome green riding-boot, rested in his hand. There was no response in Meighton's blood, no least thrill answered the touch of small, ringed fingers on his shoulder.

"I'm such a lot of trouble," whispered the girl. And then—eagerly, humbly: "Do you mind?"

"I surely don't. It's a joy to me to do anything for—"

She breathed, expectant

"For another person."

The girl looked at him and was abashed; then she set her lips firmly.

But after a moment she resumed:

"It seems so funny to see a man like—like you, working as a common lumberjack. I don't believe you know how—different you are."

"Well, I'm ambitious, anyhow. I'm going to leave here, day after to-morrow."

The girl bit her lip.

He went on, absorbedly:

"I'm going to work a while in a machine-shop and plan that lumber car I was telling your father about."

He was impatient now, to take this girl home to the hotel; for he knew she could not help him.

"I want to put the car in use back at my old home in the Ozarks." His eyes looked far away, through the pine woods and the quaking aspen trees.

The girl broke in, sharply:

"I believe there's someone down there in the backwoods that you want to see."

She searched his eyes. He did not mind; he knew she could not find the image they carried forever—that mocking face, the eyes, the mouth melting into curves. "Do you want to go back and see some girl?" she asked, wistfully.

"Yes, there's a girl I want to see. I'd like to see her just once."

As he laughed, bitterly, the other girl released her breath and smiled.

The day after, another lumberman asked him why he didn't "stick around and marry the director's girl?"

"Shut up," commanded Meighton, "if you have to be a fool when you open your head. That girl has tried to make a fool of me, I'll admit."

He went about his preparations for departure.

Nevertheless, in his heart, he knew.

That night her father came down to the tent colony where the lumber men were camped.

"Suppose you tell me again about that car of yours, Meighton, I'm interested in it."

Meighton sketched his plan. The slopes of the Ozarks were such that the company could not afford to make roads. If a car could be designed which would make its own temporary road, working in those difficult, rock-strewn hills, the vast wealth of timber could be brought to the railroads at a profit.

"My daughter has some money of her own," resumed the lumberman. "She's got interested in this as an investment; not for a great sum, you know, but enough to see you through. You've enthused her. You see, she's all the boy I've got, I like to have her take an interest in business."

The lumberman was a rough fellow who had risen to power by his own efforts. He dressed, like Meighton himself, in flannel shirt and leather boots, and despised young men of fashion. He did not know that his daughter's interest in Meighton went beyond a hope of making money. But if he had, he might not have been horrified.

He resumed, chuckling:

"I've always let the girl handle her own bit of money. She's only twenty-five now, she's never lost a cent and she's made over a thousand—not much, but it shows the stuff in her. Well, I give her advice, of course, but she takes her own head. Now, I'll look into this proposition of yours, and if it looks good to me, we'll form a stock company. You might get some others to take a little stock."

Meighton listened. A mocking face with

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the lumberman, he made a handsome Westerner.

Women are usually quick to feel power in a man—and the qualities of success. At the country hotels the waitresses were always eager to tempt him with hot cakes. They would hang over his chair while he ate and converse with him, and they invariably asked some of the gang whether he was married.

There was another girl, not of the waitress class.

At one of the hotels where the lumber gang was quartered, a director of the company stopped a while with his daughter. Among the rabble of lumbermen—tall men, short men, foreigners, drifters—she spied one who was young and very handsome, with greenish eyes and a hard, clean mouth in a leash of strong muscles.

He glanced up, saw her observing him, and waved his hand in the Western way.

"Fine-looking fellow," remarked her father, who thought that the wave of the hand was meant for him. It had in reality been impartially for the two.

"Rather impertinent, I think," said the daughter haughtily.

But all that day and the next she thought of Mindel Meighton's impertinence. When he came home in the evening she was on the porch; and he went by laughing, not seeing her. After dinner he came out of the mess-room smoking a short pipe. And once more he was not impertinent.

Finally the girl saw her father talking to this young man who was not impertinent any more, and went out to stand beside him. He told of a plan he had for getting timber transported through a mountainous region.

Lifting her face so she could look into the greenish eyes—"It's fine to plan big things," she said. "I wish I were a man."

He looked eagerly at the girl. It suddenly struck him that perhaps he could fall in love with her. He did not want her; he wanted only a girl's face for his memory—one that would blot out another face with blue eyes, a dust of freckles, and a lovely mouth.

Of course this fine lady would disdain him; he knew she was flirting with him, to break his heart—but he did not mind. She might break his heart and welcome if she could make him forget.

So, when the gang was idle, he used to ride with her in the paths that wound among the big trees.

One day, as he put her bridle into her hand, he laid his fingers an instant over hers—he wanted to try, whether his flesh would thrill, as it had once, to a girl's touch.

The rich man's daughter haughtily lifted her head. She seemed about to tell him he was impertinent. Instead she remarked, with a little flush of excitement and pleasure:

"How lovely the woods look to-day! And how splendidly you ride these wild horses! You must have been on horseback a lot."

Meighton's eyes looked through the interlacing boughs of trees. He remembered a moonlit road and a girl.

"What are you thinking about?" asked the girl.

"My old home—Blackwater, Missouri. I used to ride up the road past Townley's bridge on moonlit nights—misty, soft kind of nights, like they have in Missouri. The woods would be full of mocking-birds, and everything would smell of wild roses."

"Why don't we ride some moonlight night?"

"I'd have asked you before, only I didn't think you'd go with me."

"Why, certainly," she responded haughtily. "I'm very fond of riding."

She looked at him. His eyes changed like a lizard's back—they were blue, then green, then gray, then black. His mouth slipped its leash of muscles in a smile that was tender and passionate. She thought he was thinking of her, and drew up her little, stylish figure. What if he should be impertinent?

But he was not. They rode out into the woods and dismounted to look at the sky.

"You may help me now," she condescended.

For an instant she felt the great strength of his arms; then she found herself in the saddle. He gave her the reins without a

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She rose again and replaced the letter in her belt. Faintly smiling, not glancing at Lanny, she walked slowly out of the room.

So, he had been engaged all the while. He had thought a man need not marry an O'Malley girl—

As she started up-stairs a traveling man stood in her path.

"Hello, Jewel!" he saluted, with a smirk.

"Get out of my way!" she cried in a fury. Her rage was against the whole race of men. Even Mindel Meighton, to whom she had turned for love and honor, had turned against her.

The traveling man laughed; he thought she was coquettish.

"Oh, Jewel, cut out the dignity!" he exclaimed. "Stop and talk a minute. If you don't, I vow I'll kiss you." He took a step nearer her.

And she struck him savagely between the eyes. It was a blow struck at the whole race of men—a blow at Mindel Meighton, the traitor.

The traveling man reeled backward in surprise. He put his hand to his face, which was white, showing the red marks of her fingers.

"You little wildcat!" he said thickly. "You little Irish fury!"

She breathed hard.

"Don't you ever try that again. No man ever kissed me yet, and no man ever will."

But she had kissed Mindel Meighton. He had that to remember. He could tell that, some day, to his new wife, the girl with money. Julia ran into her bedroom, slammed and locked its door, and sat down on her bed.

She had kissed him. She thought the memory of that kiss would kill her. With something hard and rough she rubbed her lips till she made them bleed. How could she ever hurt him enough—the man who had taken the kiss? And all the while he had meant—

She was too angry to want to kill him.

That would be a clumsy revenge; she knew a better way. He could speak contemptuously of their love if he pleased! He could marry a girl with money if he chose—

"But he will not forget me!" thought Julia.

He would be thirsting for her always.

Now, she did not care any more what became of her; she would marry some one else. Since he was such a fool as to want to marry an O'Malley, she might take Buck Sturtevant.

Some day, when the charge of assault with a deadly weapon was outlawed, Mindel would come back to Blackwater. He would find her another man's wife.

Then she knew how he would suffer. She had seen him suffer when another man looked into her eyes or touched her hand. Well, she was not pitying him now. She would give herself to Buck; she would love Buck! She would shower on Buck, in Mindel's sight, what—by that time—she knew Mindel would be ready to sell his life for.

Buck Sturtevant was the only man on earth now whom she did not hate. She sobbed aloud in the bitterness of her soul, and twisted in her fingers the little gold cross of forgiveness and love.

"But I can't forgive Mindel Meighton," she cried. "It would be a sin for me to forgive him."

CHAPTER XVI.

DECISION OF A SORT.

MINDEL MEIGHTON went West. The first year he worked for a lumber company in the forests of the Northwest. It was a fine country—but always his mind turned back to the Ozarks of Missouri, the real country, he felt, of the lumber king. As he did his work his mind was constantly on that car he meant to make, to take the big trees over the slopes of the Ozarks, so that they could be put on the railroad cheaply.

His intelligence and energy won him the place of a boss in the lumber camp. During the year he improved in appearance. Big, blond, burned pink and biscuit-color, dressed in corduroys and flannel shirt, with the high laced boots of

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it; don't deny it. You took it from the post-office box—my box—and steamed it open, and then put it back looking as if it hadn't been handled. Can you deny that?"

"Why, I ain't denying it, am I?" The man laughed. There was a musical note in his laugh, not unlike Julia's own. He had the transparent flesh, the mobile features and mischievous eyes of the Irish father who had died of consumption in the malarial air of the Missouri Valley. Beulah resembled her own mother, the first wife.

In her rage that morning at the hotel Julia was more than ever like her brother.

She continued:

"Opening United States mail is a crime. I could have you and Beulah arrested if I was a mind to."

Lanny's mirth, at this suggestion, reached the pitch of delight.

"You seen the drunken beast yesterday," he remarked. "Do you still want him? Well, I vow!"

Her breath came short.

"Don't call him names to me—don't dare!"

"Say, Jewel, the morning mail just got in, and another letter came for you. I opened that, too—what do you think you'll do about it?"

Julia snatched the letter. She was so eager for Mindel's own words, in his own handwriting, she did not mind now that Lanny had read it. It must be that after Mindel got away, when he reflected on what had happened, he had come to himself and realized she could not have betrayed him.

He did love; he did trust her.

She turned the letter in her hand; it had been mailed on the train. He could not wait to reach a station! Julia's cheeks were crimson, while her throat remained white as if it might be cold, with one large vein visibly throbbing.

Leaning on the sideboard, Lanny observed her. His mottled and dissipated face was triumphant. He laughed lazily.

Julia had forgotten his presence. She tore open her envelope, and the first sentence of the short letter leaped at her:

"I don't blame you, Julia."

She was glad he no longer blamed her. Yet she could not—just—get—what he meant. It was a cold letter, a very strange letter, to her. Julia became conscious that her brother was watching her. She sat down on the edge of one of the dining-room chairs and spread her letter between the cruets, on the table-cloth.

Meighton wrote a definite, very black hand. The words of the letter leaped at her.

"I do not blame you—" she read again. Then she went on:

> I'd be a fool to have hard feelings. We're both glad to have our freedom. We were crazy to think we wanted to marry. Just call me a fool for asking an O'Malley girl to marry me.

Julia cowered as if before a blow. She had often heard the sentiment expressed:

"A man wouldn't want to marry an O'Malley girl!"

So he also thought *that,* of her.

> But I've surely got over my foolishness. Don't try to reach me with a letter; you can't find me, and, anyhow, I don't care about hearing, any more than I suppose you want to hear from me.

After the shock, Julia came to herself gradually.

"He was angry when he wrote," she thought. "He does, he does love me. If I can just find him!"

Her brother saw the light come back to her eyes, and continued:

"Now, I'll tell you something else. Babe Sweet got back from Kansas City this morning, and he seen this here beau of yours while he was away. He's telling all over town what Ming told him."

He paused maliciously.

Julia could not bear the suspense.

"What about Mindel?"

"He got married last night—or maybe it won't be till to-night. He's been engaged to this girl ever since he first went to Kansas City. Babe Sweet says he thinks it's a girl with money."

"It's a lie!" cried Julia.

"You can ask Babe."

There was no need for her to ask Babe—she knew when Lanny told the truth.

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